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# THE SECRET OF THE GREEN VASE

FRANCES COOKE



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**THE  
SECRET OF THE GREEN VASE**





# THE SECRET OF THE GREEN VASE

BY  
FRANCES COOKE



NEW YORK, BOSTON, CINCINNATI, CHICAGO, SAN FRANCISCO  
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# The Secret of the Green Vase

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## CHAPTER I.

MARY PATTERSON.

"I WILL speak to my Lord, though I am but dust and ashes."

The voice quavered on the still air, the tremulous hands holding the book almost dropped it—its weight a burden beyond their feeble strength.

"Thou showest me to myself, what I am, what I have been, and what I have become; for I am nothing, and I knew it not."

"I am nothing, and I knew it not!" He mumbled the words over and over again, before he laid the book down on his knee, and leaning his chin upon the hands that were now clasped over the thick cane, stared retrospectively before him.

"It is a long time since she read the words to me," he said, in his thin and broken tones, "a long time. My daughter, oh, my daughter, why do you delay so long?"

Blinding tears fell from the faded eyes.

"How beautiful you were," he whispered; "how beautiful! When will you return to make my heart glad?"

He was a lonely old man, this man who had once been feared and respected as the Squire of Lady's Hall. A lonely old man, indeed, one would know by looking at him. And on closer inspection would add "and one woefully neglected."

For the clothes he wore were ragged and uncared for; the unkempt white locks, crowning a head nobly shaped, fell to his shoulders; his whole appearance was that of a man who knew no love or tenderness.

Yet who was to see this, since no soul who cared for him ever passed his threshold—since no outsider ever stopped even to discuss the weather with a man who, a score of years before, had held the respect and esteem of all the country-side. His housekeeper, Mary Patterson, went to the village store three times a week, and dickered sharply

over every penny she expended, so that she got scant welcome from the shopkeeper. Little did this bother the woman, however. She had no time for kind words or pleasant speech, and would not delay five seconds if money were not the cause.

Yet, strangely enough, Mary Patterson was held in high esteem by all the people, for it was rumored that her one-time generous and wealthy master was now dependent upon her savings for his daily bread. The rumor gained ground, as such things will, and it had become an accepted fact. Perhaps it was for this reason that no one intruded on the solitude of Lady's Hall.

Nevertheless, it was a sad fate for a man like Daniel Brevoort—the fate that left him broken in mind and body, gleaning what comfort he could from the few books he still had strength and sight left to read. The fate that bowed his white head upon the heavy cane now, and brought the helpless, hopeless tears of lonely old age to his eyes. Slowly they rolled down his furrowed cheeks until lost in the whiteness of the beard which swept upon his chest. And presently his lips formed words:

“My daughter, oh, my daughter!”



He murmured them brokenly, longingly.

"When will you return? It is so long since you went away—and I have lived such a round of days waiting for you. How long it is! It must be a year—ah, surely it is a year! And what would keep so loving a girl from her father's side if something had not happened to her? A year—a whole, long, bitter year! It is too much. I cannot bear it longer—my heart is breaking."

He muttered to himself, and shook his stick, and his whole body began to twitch nervously. And then the sound of a harsh voice behind him made him sit bolt upright.

"Of course! Stand out in front of the whole country-side, so that all can see you! How many times have I told you that if you want to scream like that you should stay in the house? You're looking for what they'll give you before long—the asylum, mark my words—"

"I'll be good—I'll be good, Mary," said Daniel Brevoort, nervously. "I wasn't making any noise."

"You were—I heard you. Get up, and go around to the back of the house."

He obeyed her meekly.

"Will you watch for her, Mary—she might

feel hurt if no one was here to give her welcome. Sit here, you, and watch for Florence."

Mary Patterson snorted.

"Don't worry about Florence. If ever she comes this way she'll find her welcome ready for her, unnatural hussy!"

The old man winced. Mary Patterson was in a particularly savage mood this morning, and when in that state of mind was apt to vent her ill-temper on the first object that came in her path.

"A year is not so great a while, Mary," he began wistfully. "She will be back soon now, the child. She will not stay away much longer."

"A year!" laughed Mary Patterson. "It is twenty-five years since she shook the dust of Lady's Hall from her ungrateful shoes, and went out into the world, God knows where, instead of staying at home to take care of her own flesh and blood. It was easy for her to find strangers to do it for her, wasn't it, now? She's an old woman by this time—a worn-out, withered old woman. When her own children turn on her she'll be likely to come back to the house she despised—not till then."

The father shook his head. He could not understand her.

"It seems so long since she left me," he murmured. "So very, very long. She is so beautiful, my girl. Her hair is so golden and so lovely, her eyes so blue. Oh, Florence, Florence, my little Florence!"

His voice rose in a tearful wail that echoed shrilly along the garden paths. With quick alertness, Mary Patterson grasped his arm, and half-dragged, half-carried him to the back of the house.

"I'll shut you up in your own room and turn the key on you if you shout like that again," she said, fiercely, shoving him down in a big rustic chair with a force that made his teeth chatter. "Have you no senses left, you fool?"

He cowered before her, and his hands fluttered in an aimless fashion. She picked up his stick and gave it to him, and stood over him, her hand upraised as if she meant to strike. Shivering visibly, he crouched still lower. His under-jaw dropped, his head sank upon his breast, his eyes stared before him vacantly. She watched him, grim satisfaction taking the place of the anger on her countenance. He would prove no trouble for the rest of that day—she had frightened him back to his habitual state—a sort of senseless stupor, from which he would not rouse until the

next morning. Just as she turned to leave him she heard the postman's whistle. The gate was always latched, and no one had the desire to unlatch it. She walked quickly to the front of the house, thanking her stars that she had succeeded in getting the old man away before any one saw him. She took the letter sourly enough, and an evil expression leaped into her eyes as she glanced at the handwriting.

"Again? What can she have to say to him now? She wrote only a month ago."

"I say," called the postman from the gate—for she had turned toward the house—"there's two cents postage due on that."

There wasn't, but every one knew Mary Patterson's failing, and once in a while one more venturesome than the rest traded on it, having a little quiet fun at her expense.

"Two cents due!" she cried, shrilly, holding up the letter and glancing at both sides for the due stamp. "What do you mean? There's a stamp on it."

"Yes," said the postman, "but it's over-weight. Let me look at it—oh, no, I've made a mistake. It's another letter—one for Mrs. Williams, of Cedar Hill street. But I say," still holding the

letter, "how's the old man, anyhow? Used to see him around occasionally, but I never catch a glimpse of him any more."

"I wish I could change places with you then," said Mary Patterson. "I see enough of him."

"P'raps it won't be so bad when his daughter comes home."

Mary Patterson laughed.

"*When* she comes home! This is no home of hers."

"You don't mean to say that the old man would turn her out?"

"No danger of her ever trying to come in."

"Why it's all over town that she's coming back next week."

"Then it's the first I've heard of it," said Mary Patterson, but in spite of herself her face paled. "I hope she brings her provisions with her. I don't grudge the bite I give the Squire, but I'll give neither bite nor sup to the one's that neglected him in his old age."

"And you're right," said the carrier, with emphasis. "You've done what few ever done before you, I'll be bound. You were a young woman when you came to Lady's Hall first, I've heard

tell, and you've nothing to show for the years that's passed."

Mary Patterson shook her head.

"Nothing," she said, thawing a little under the unmistakable admiration in his tones; "but who told you about his daughter?"

"Why, Larry Denton just came back from the city where he went to see his sister married. He met her there, and she said she was coming here some time this month. If I were you, I'd give her a chance to do her duty now. There's those that know who tell me old Tom Phelps doesn't stand alone here outside the gate at night."

A faint tinge of color touched Mary Patterson's cheeks.

"Tom Phelps is as good a man as ever walked, and if ever young Tom stepped out he'd be a bit lonesome. He needs a woman to keep house for him, anyhow, Mary, and it's you can do it. Let the Squire's daughter take care of her own—you've done it long enough."

"Well, I'll see," said Mary Patterson, slowly. "But as for Tom Phelps—don't you go believing any such story as that. Tom Phelps is nothing to me; no, nor never will be."

"So I've heard," said the man, laughing; "but

I wouldn't like to risk much money on it. Women as old as you don't blush like a girl of sixteen for nothing."

"You'd better be going on," she said with some asperity. "I've wasted too much time on you as it is. If you stop to chin with every one this long I don't see how you ever get through."

"Oh, time doesn't bother me," he said, teasingly, "not when I can listen to any such interesting disclosures. So you're going to marry Tom Phelps! Well, well!"

Mary Patterson turned white with rage.

"I never said that—if you repeat any such story I'll sue you for libel—I'll—I'll——"

But waving his hand at her, the man moved on, and was lost to sight under the arching trees.

"Fool!" she said. "I think all men are idiots. It's my own fault for stopping to talk to the like of him. So Florence Brevoort is coming back—coming back here!" She walked slowly up the path and around to the back of the house once more. The old man sat as she left him—he would sit that way all day unless she roused him to partake of food. She looked at him now and addressed him. "So she's coming back again, is she? Well, we shall see what we shall see! Tom

Phelps is not so poor—if the worst came— But I'll wait."

She went into the house, ascended a flight of stairs, and entered a room at the top. It was a large, comfortable, almost, one might say, a pretty room. There were white curtains, pretty pictures, a fine rug, a canary singing cheerfully in its yellow cage, easy rockers, and a handsome bed. Mary Patterson seated herself in one of the rockers, picked up a pearl-handled knife from the table, and deliberately slit open the letter she held in her hand, which was addressed to "Daniel Brevoort, Lady's Hall, Cliffden."

"MY DEAR FATHER:" it began.

"I have striven hard to keep up a correspondence with you, in spite of your continued silence for over a quarter of a century. Again and again I have begged you to send me a line, showing that you did not feel as harshly as of old toward me. I have never regretted my choice—not once. But the struggle has been a hard one. My husband's failing health, the death of the children one after the other, kept me down to the ground, so that I could not seem ever to get above water.

"But now I am venturing to come in person—I and my two daughters. It is with much fear



that I begin this journey, hoping that at it, and you will not turn me from your door. I shall tell you why I have resolved upon this decisive step. You remember how delicate I was when I was growing up, and how the waters of the Lady's Well cured me? My youngest daughter, Florence, is even as I was then, and I am sure that if she can get to Cliffden, and breathe the pure air of our mountains, and taste the waters from the Lady's Well that she will recover her strength.

"I am so sure of this that I have infected her with my hopefulness and enthusiasm. My eldest girl, Hildegard, is very strong and very beautiful. She has consented to come with us, and to see us settled in Lady's Hall, if you will allow us to stay. She will then have to return to the city to her pupils.

"Now, my dear father, hard as the struggle has been, I have never asked one penny from you. I chose George Craig for my husband and I was never sorry for it—from the day I married him until the day of his death. I have known much happiness—greater sorrow—but never self-reproach. The only sting during all these years was in your silence and coldness. For my child's sake I must brave these once again. I have seen

so many of them die—I can not see Florence go. She is so young, so sweet, so good.

“Try to welcome me, my own dear father. We come to ask nothing from you but the shelter of your roof, and the gift of health for your own. After all, scorn us as you may, we are your own, and it was because I was so truly your daughter that I chose my husband and clung to him.

“I will accept no dismissal at your hands until I stand face to face with you. Surely since the same blood flows in our veins you will not turn us from your threshold. Do not think I expect anything from you. I have lived five and twenty sore years without your wealth—I can live the rest of my life without it.

“You will see me now in a few days. God grant my father may remember his old-time affection—God grant that he may welcome me with but the hundredth part of his old-time warmth, and I shall consider myself blest indeed.

“Your loving daughter.

“FLORENCE CRAIG.”

Mary Patterson read the lines to the end, her face paling, her lips working, her fingers twitching.

"So it is true," she said, at last; "it is true. She is coming here."

She looked about the room, her eyes gleaming. Then, crumpling the letter in her hand, she rose, and walked the length of the hall, entering another room.

But what a contrast!

The old wooden bed, the ragged bedding, the coarse pillow, the uncarpeted and dirty floor, the broken chair, the rickety washstand! Not a thing seemed to redeem its bare poverty but the picture resting on the old bureau—the picture of a girl in her twenties, with a roguish, laughing, careless face. This was one of the few things Mary Patterson had been forced to leave the man who might truly be called her victim—all else that she could she deprived him of. He did not protest. But the picture was his treasure—all that he had left of one dearly loved, and he would not part with it.

In the course of an hour a wonderful change took place in the room. The woman put on an apron and sweeping-cap, and gave it a cleaning—a process to which it had been a stranger for many a day. She took the mattress from her own bed, and the bed-coverings; the rug from her floor,

the pictures from her walls. In an hour the room was transformed. But she worked savagely, and there were no thoughts of kindness in her heart.

After that she went down into the kitchen and prepared a frugal meal. The old man ate passively—evidently not so much from appetite as from fear of his caretaker. She watched him with pitiless eyes.

"Now come up to your bed," she said, when he had finished.

He heard the words, and raised his faded eyes to the western sky. The sun had not yet gone down, and he pointed to it, shaking his white head.

"But you must," she reiterated sharply.

His head sunk upon his breast again, and he made no move. She watched him silently. Then, with a shrug of her shoulders, she picked up the plate and cup and walked away.

The old man did not rouse. He spoke no word, although his lips were moving. Had one been able to catch the whisper he or she might have heard the reiteration of that sentence from the "Imitation":

"I will speak to my Lord, though I am but dust and ashes."

And the sun went down. Lower and lower it sank to rest, and the old man's weary eyes closed with its going. He seemed as if asleep, with the reflection of the golden light resting like a blessing on his snowy head, and pale old face.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE VISITORS TO LADY'S HALL.

"AND he is rich you say, mother?"

"He was at that time, dear."

"How rich?"

It was another voice this time, totally dissimilar to that which had asked the first question. Florence Craig, pale, fragile, shadowy, with a face almost too spirituelle for earthly guise, raised her eyes with languid interest as her sister Hildegarde, put the second terse query. Her tones were full, deep, vibrant—denoting a strong nature, and there was an undercurrent which could easily deepen into scorn.

"That I can not say," answered Mrs. Craig, with a little sigh. "I know that I was never denied a wish; that I had as many servants as I have fingers; and that I have never known the meaning of the word luxury since I left my father's house."

She made these statements without any exhibition of emotion—facts they were to her, potent

facts, which lost or gained nothing by the repetition. Hildegarde studied her mother's face with some keenness, striving to view her in an impersonal light—so hard a thing to do with those near and dear to us.

"I should never have left my father's house," she said, slowly.

A faint color tinged the pale face of the mother.

"No?" she questioned.

"Oh, mother—don't think I blame you. But—" and she smiled confidently, "*do* you think I should have left my father's house?"

"If your father were Daniel Brevoort—yes," was the unhesitating reply. "Unless you were satisfied to renounce the man you loved."

"You were right, mother—you were right, right!" exclaimed Florence Craig from her sofa. "I am glad, proud, that my mother can look back on the years, and say that she was strong enough to fight for her own heart!"

She glanced at Hildegarde—almost a challenging light in her lovely eyes.

"We won't quarrel about it now," said the mother, wearily. "I fought it all out years ago—it is all over. George Craig was a good and loving

husband to me—" Tears choked her. Tears, too, started to Florence's eyes at the sob in her mother's throat.

But Hildegarde sat unmoved.

"Be logical," she said quite calmly. "Our father was considered by my grandfather to be his deadliest enemy. I myself should have little love for a lawyer who was the chief instrument in robbing me of such valuable property as grandfather lost — whether it was right or not. My mother chooses this man for her husband, and leaves her father's house. She was right — perfectly right," with a smile at Florence. "I am not saying she was wrong."

"But—"

"I said I should not have left my father's house," repeated Hildegarde. She rose to her feet and looked down at them; "and you both know I should not, either. Or, having left it, I should not go back to it—beggared."

Now the mask of ice was thrown aside and the bitterness leaped forth in her eyes and face. Mrs. Craig shook her head.

"Hilda, we can not see these things in the same light. You are too young to understand."



Hildegarde opened her lips, shut them again convulsively.

"It is imperative that we go back now. If Florence can once regain her health I shall be satisfied with the sacrifice."

"And you are willing to gain health at such a sacrifice?" asked Hildegarde, turning on her sister somewhat turbulently.

"I never yet found mother in the wrong," answered Florence in a steady voice.

Silence fell on the group of three. Hildegarde went to the window and stared moodily down into the street. Mrs. Craig sewed steadily; Florence read for a while, then dropped her book on her lap, and gazed with dreamy eyes into the open fire.

It was not an unattractive apartment, this sitting-room of the Craigs. It was far from being luxurious, but it bore the traces of refined femininity, and a refined woman can do much to cover lack of luxury in her home. But the inmates made one forget the surroundings. Mrs. Craig, slender as a girl in spite of her white hair, with a face which had been strikingly lovely, and which had gained somewhat of pathos in the hard trials that the years had brought. Florence, her youth-

ful counterpart—slender and delicate-looking, with blue eyes, soft golden hair, and a sweet face—a good face, though it denoted neither strong will nor strong purpose. That might be the result of her state of health, however. For the five years past she had been failing steadily.

Hildegard Craig, however, was the direct opposite of both mother and sister. Tall, strong, and lithe of form, dark, with a beautiful face, in which the lines of conscious strength and depth of purpose were clearly defined. The closely shut lips denoted repression and obstinacy—in fact, while the soul of honor and fairness, she was apt to incline to her own way of thinking in preference to that of others. She would come to no decision lightly, but having once reached it, it would take much to move her from it.

She entirely disapproved of her mother's return to Cliffden—had, indeed, suggested half a dozen schemes—involving always the greatest sacrifice on her part—to keep them away. But the mother's natural yearning for her childhood home, her desire to see the father who was dear as ever he had been, and dearer, indeed, because of the lapse of years—confirmed her in this resolution. With quiet strength she set her own will against

the stronger one of her eldest daughter, and as is often the way with non-assertive people, carried out her resolution. Not that Hildegarde's open rebellion might not have changed the aspect of affairs. She was, in reality, the support of the three, what little the mother made by sewing in her leisure moments sufficing barely to buy a few additional luxuries for the delicate Florence. Hildegarde might, therefore, with perfect impunity, have set her face against this project of her mother's—"a wild fancy" she had dubbed it when it first crossed that mother's mind. But her heart, while proud and independent, was a loving one. She loved them both better than herself. Her love yearned to see them go where they might have comfort and content; her pride rebelled at the thought of their possible reception; her independence felt the galling chain that she, with all her efforts, could not do what was necessary for them.

But her heart won the victory this time. She turned and glanced at those two so dear to her—at Florence, with downcast lashes on her young and gentle face; at her mother with the shadow in her eyes—a shadow which she felt *her* disapproval had brought there. After all, what was

the use? Why not yield and make them happy?

She advanced to Mrs. Craig's side and laid her hand softly on her shoulder.

"Never mind, dear mother," she said, in an altered tone; "why should I dread anything that you face so courageously? We will do as you say—we will go there, dear. I will see you and Florence ensconced safely under the shelter of your old home, please God."

A great light shot across the mother's face. She clasped her daughter's hand closely, and began to cry.

"Now I am content," she said, between her sobs. "Oh, Hildegard, you know I could never, never have the heart to do anything without you."

Hildegard smiled half-sadly.

"Don't cry, mother. You would succeed—and you will, too. I dare say he'll be only too glad to have his dear daughter home again."

Mrs. Craig shook her head.

"That remains to be proven, Hildegard. He had a gentle heart, always—I can not understand his silence. That he received my letters I know—but, Hildegard, I must find out the worst,"

Hildegard nodded.

"Yes, dear mother—we will find it out together. Write and tell him we are going to visit him. But dearest, do not ask me to stay there after you are safely and happily settled. You won't, mother? You know that if I lose my pupils now it will take me a long time to get them back again—there are many teachers as good as I am who have none at all."

"I understand, dear," said Mrs. Craig. "I shall write to-night, and show you the letter. And we will start——"

"To-morrow, if you like," said Hildegarde, with a tender smile.

And not even Hildegarde, herself, independent and proud as she might be, had a word to say against the phrasing of the letter that her mother handed her a half-hour later. Both girls read it two or three times before it was finally despatched, Hildegarde carrying it to the nearest mail-box.

And that was the letter that Mary Patterson received, and that the poor old Squire of Lady's Hall was never to see.

\* \* \* \*

At the station at Cliffden late the following afternoon the three ladies were the only passen-

gers to alight and Mrs. Craig's first query riveted the attention of the station-master.

"Isn't there any conveyance that will take us to Lady's Hall?" she asked.

"Lady's Hall?" repeated the man vaguely, wondering who this might be—speculating whether it was indeed the daughter of old Daniel Brevoort, of whom he had heard so much. "If you won't like to walk it, ma'am, there'll be a stage past here in ten minutes or so."

"We'll wait for the stage," said Mrs. Craig, decidedly. "It's a good, long walk," she said, turning to her daughters, "we had better wait."

"Sit here," said Hildegarde. She was much concerned at the pallor of Florence's delicate face. "The rest won't hurt us. In case—" she hesitated a moment—"if grandfather is not prepared—there is a hotel about here somewhere?"

"Oh, we'll find some place—a farmhouse, if nothing else," said Mrs. Craig.

It was something like a half-hour later, instead of ten minutes, before a lumbering stage coach drew up opposite the station. Hildegarde called to the driver, and the three ladies climbed in, followed by more than one curious pair of eyes, for visitors to Lady's Hall were unknown in that re-

gion. No one, not even the oldest native among them, could trace the beautiful Florence Brevoort in this slender, white-haired, sad-faced woman, and the younger Florence was by far too pale and shadowy to recall the restless, wild-rose beauty of the heiress of Lady's Hall.

Mrs. Craig could not recognize one of the landmarks; the place had changed beyond her recognition. Nor until they had reached the border of the village, and the poor hack began straining up the rise that led between a stretch of verdant country to Lady's Hall itself, did the faintest gleam come to her face. She sat bolt upright, every nerve tense, her eyes fixed with painful intensity on the road beyond. She knew it, now. Many a time and oft had she skimmed along this very road on her reckless little mare, who knew her every mood, and responded to it. The years slipped away—she was a girl again. She wondered what had happened to the pretty mare after she had left her that June morning. Had she been sold—but no. More likely she had been kept in remembrance—

They were now turning into the broad road that led directly to Lady's Hall. Mrs. Craig sat quite still, but a strange intentness had crept into

her body—it was rigid. Hildegarde felt this emotion—felt for her, too, and watched her gravely. Florence, roused to sudden interest, put a hot little hand on her mother's arm.

"What a quaint, neglected old place," she said. "Just look at it, mother. It seems as if it were one of those enchanted castles we read of in our fairy tales—"

The coach had stopped. The driver waited.

"Those windows are fairly covered with ivy. Surely no one lives here—"

"Why are you stopping?" asked Hildegarde, abruptly. She was conscious of a shock of surprise, almost of fear.

"Did you say Lady's Hall?" asked the man. "This is Lady's Hall—old Squire Brevoort's place."

"Lady's Hall!" Florence looked at her mother in consternation: "Lady's Hall!"

"Come, mother," said Hildegarde, gently; "we get out here, dear."

She assisted her mother and Florence to the ground, paid the driver, and saw him on his way. Florence stood staring without a word. She had not had a chance to recover her mental balance. As for the mother, she was dazed.



"Come," said Hildegarde again. "We are here—do not let us draw back now. Lean on me—that is it. We'll see this through together."

She put her hand about her mother's waist, and with that firm touch to give her courage, Hildegarde unlatched the gate with her strong fingers, and together they walked up to the great front door. From this door the only daughter of the Squire had stolen five and twenty years before. What feelings were hers as she stood there now, and heard Hildegarde knock imperiously upon the oaken panel, for the bell was rusty and useless.

After much ado and a long space of waiting they heard a step in the hall, a hand fumbling at the chain. The door was pulled open and Mary Patterson confronted them. Mrs. Craig failed to recognize in her the rosy-cheeked domestic who had been the youngest servant in the household the day she left it.

"Where is Squire Brevoort?" demanded Hildegarde, with some sharpness in her voice. Looking at her mother, she saw that she was too overcome to speak. "Will you tell him that his daughter is here, and wishes to see him?"

"The Squire?" said Mary Patterson. "He

is asleep in the garden. If you will step inside—”

Mrs. Craig clung to Hildegarde.

“I can’t stand much more,” she whispered.

“My mother is faint,” said Hildegarde. “The journey has been a trying one—from the city, as I suppose you know, and the excitement is too much for her. Bring us somewhere to rest.”

“May I offer you my room—that is all I have, excepting the Squire’s own—” said Mary Patterson.

They entered the dusty, cobwebbed old hall, and followed her up the flight of stairs to the lately dismantled apartment—still comfortable enough in spite of its lack of furnishings. Here Mrs. Craig, totally overcome, sank into a chair.

“Oh, I must be asleep—it is a dreadful nightmare,” she said under her breath; “my home, my dear, dear old home, how have you fallen to decay!”

“Does Squire Brevoort expect us?” asked Hildegarde. “My mother wrote and told him we were coming.”

Mary Patterson hesitated a moment.

“He did receive a letter some two hours ago that seemed to excite him greatly,” she said; “I

did not know what it was about—the Squire tells me very little of his affairs. He seemed to lose his head altogether after he read it—in fact every letter he got from his daughter made him irritable and hard to handle—”

“Might we have a cup of tea?” interrupted Hildegarde, with some coldness. To Mary Patterson, used as she was to being absolute mistress in Lady’s Hall, the tones came like a shock. She pulled herself up, set her lips together, and withdrew at once.

“Mother,” said Hildegarde, quickly, “there’s something wrong here—that woman’s not altogether straight. The Squire received a letter that excited him greatly—she did not know what it was about—and in the same breath she asserts that every letter he received from his daughter made him irritable and hard to handle. There is surely something wrong.”

“Oh, my dear girls, If you had only known Lady’s Hall, if you had only known Lady’s Hall!” said the mother, the tears streaming down her face. “This is its ghost, its specter.”

“Don’t give way yet,” urged Hildegarde; “we may have come to serve instead of being served. Evidently this woman is the only person in the

house beside our grandfather. We must see him next—but not until you have recovered your strength. Mother, dear, you had better go to him alone—you would rather do so, wouldn't you?"

"I—I think I would," she said. "Hildegarde, I can not understand."

"Do not try—I will solve it all for you in a little while," said the girl. "Be brave, mother, be strong. It will soon be over. Soon we shall know the worst."

## CHAPTER III.

## THE OLD SQUIRE.

MARY PATTERSON came back, with the tea on an old battered silver tray. She served nothing else—simply the tea they had asked for. Hildegard declined to touch any of it.

"May I ask your name?" she inquired, as gently as she could, so as not to antagonize the somewhat sour-looking spinster.

"Mary Patterson," was the answer, given sharply and without any apparent desire toward propitiation.

Hildegard was silent then. She felt that whatever information was forthcoming must come from her grandfather, and she could not demean herself by asking questions. Mrs. Craig drank her tea hastily and rose to her feet.

"Kindly take me to my father," she said; "or, rather, tell me where he is, and I will go myself."

"Go alone, mother—that will be best," inter-

posed Hildegarde. "You will not mind us trespassing on you—in your room here, I mean—a little further?" to Mary Patterson.

"I do not mind," she said; "the Squire is in the garden right below the steps in his arm-chair."

Mrs. Craig left the apartment hurriedly.

"I do not think my master will recognize her," ventured Mary Patterson after a few moments.

"And why?" asked Hildegarde.

"He is a very old man, and wanders somewhat in his mind. He is really out of his head more than half the time."

"Is there some one to take care of him?"

"Only myself."

"Yourself? You are the only servant?" cried Florence in astonishment.

"The only one left, miss."

Florence's underlip began to tremble, and she bent her eyes on the ground. She was, at heart, a petted child, and the disappointment experienced that afternoon had been very bitter. So much had Lady's Hall become a fairy land to her that no splendor could have astonished her. The awakening was a shock indeed. Only the presence of Mary Patterson restrained her from burst-

ing into tears. Hildegarde, the older and more experienced, was really conscious of a sense of relief had she stopped to analyze her sentiments. No greater sacrifice could have been asked of her than to come to a wealthy house, soliciting alms, as she expressed it somewhat bitterly, and a trifle unjustly. But to come to a mansion fallen on evil times, its master old and in probable need of her assistance, was very different. She would willingly extend a helping hand, that being her nature

She, too, sat with her eyes on the ground, but the expression on her face was very unlike that on her sister Florence's countenance. The dark eyebrows were drawn together in a puzzled frown. The lips were set and unsmiling. Mary Patterson looked from one to the other. Florence was a weak, sickly thing, she told herself, contemptuously, but the other—

She studied "the other." Hildegarde's face was a mask, but she could not disguise her pride, and at times, she could be disagreeable. She felt annoyed at Mary Patterson; and therefore disagreeable. She felt that there was something, some mystery, in this house—something that was underhanded and tricky—and above all things she detested trickiness and unfair deal-

ings. So she sat pondering. And Mary Patterson, staring, forgot to guard her own face, and presently Hildegard raised her dark eyes and met the intent gaze of those light-gray orbs. They held each other a second. At the end of it a slight smile hovered at the corners of Hildegard's mouth—she felt that Mary Patterson was betraying herself. The stern gaze, the smile, brought a hot flush to the older woman's cheeks. She sprang to her feet in anger, but as she turned toward the door, it was thrown open, and Mrs. Craig stood upon the threshold. At sight of her, both her daughters cried out, and ran to her.

"Mother!" cried Florence, "what is it? What is the matter? You are ill!"

Hildegard could only stare at her. Mrs. Craig put her arm about Florence, and rested her hand on Hildegard for support. Both actions were characteristic of her attitude toward her daughters.

"My father," she said, in a low and thrilling whisper, "is dead. I have come too late."

Florence shuddered. Mary Patterson uttered a cry and sank back against the wall.

"I found him—with the sun shining on his poor white head—oh. I knew him—it was his own



kind, good, loving face! I knelt at his feet and called. I spoke to him—tenderly— O my God, he will never, never speak to me again! I have come too late, too late!”

“Oh, mother, no,” comforted Hildegarde. “It may be a swoon, dear—he is old, and perhaps has moments of unconsciousness. Stay here with Florence, and this woman and I will go to see him. Do, mother.”

The mother clung to her.

“Oh, child,” she said, “I know death too well. It is death, my dearest, it is death.”

“Let me go, mother,” urged Hildegarde. “Florence, sit down and talk to her until we come back.” She spoke imperiously, and half-led, half-supported her mother to the rocker. Florence knelt beside her and put her arms about her tenderly, while Hildegarde, followed by Mary Patterson, left the room.

They found the poor old man lying crouched in his chair, his nerveless hands upon his knees, his eyes half closed, his mouth drooping. The body was still warm—life must have left him almost at the moment that his daughter knelt at his chair and called his name. His last breath must have parted his lips just as

the wish of his aching and lonely heart was granted.

Hildegarde touched his forehead, felt his pulse, stood regarding him a moment. A great pity stirred his heart. Quicker than her mother to read the signs, she saw at once that even death, the peaceful, could not smooth away the sadness of that wrinkled face, the pathos of the lines that a neglected old age had graven on his countenance.

"We will carry him to his room," she said, briefly, to Mary Patterson, "and try to attend to him—or get some one to do it. Neither my mother nor my sister is strong—an occurrence like this is apt to give them a shock from which they will find it hard to recover."

"I don't want to touch him," said Mary Patterson, trembling, full of ignorant superstition. "I don't want to lay my hand on him."

Hildegarde's eyes flashed.

"But you will," she said. "What would you do if you were here alone? Let him sit this way until you summoned help? Here—take his feet. And indeed if I were able to carry him myself I wouldn't allow you to touch him."

Scorn trembled in her tones. After all, blood was thicker than water, and Hildegarde Craig re-

membered that this poor old man was her mother's father, that she was his grandchild, and that while they imagined him living in pride and wealth, he had been really poor and in want. All this quivered through the girl's heart, leaving it very warm and tender.

Awed by the command in her voice, yielding, indeed, to the stronger will, Mary Patterson did as she was told, and between them they conveyed the body of Squire Daniel Brevoort into the room he had occupied in life, and laid him upon his bed. For the first time Hildegard took time to lay aside her wraps.

"Get a towel or handkerchief to close his mouth," she said, stooping, as she spoke, to draw the lids over the sightless eyes. She knew little about death, or what to do when death came, but she was filled with the great desire to spare her mother all the sorrow possible.

"There is an undertaker near at hand?" she asked.

"One in the village—none nearer."

"Is there any one you can send?"

"No one—unless I go myself. And," spitefully, "I doubt if he will come, for it is well known that the Squire of Lady's Hall was a beggar."

"He will come for me," said Hildegarde, haughtily. "Tell him that he can have payment in advance if he so desires."

Mary Patterson grumbled under her breath. Had it been later she would have refused utterly, but there was still two hours of twilight. She hated the very thought of leaving this clear-eyed, sharp young woman alone in Lady's Hall—who knew what she might discover?

But there was no alternative.

"Say nothing to my mother—tell her I am coming to her at once," called Hildegarde after her as she left the room. She stood looking down at the prostrate figure.

"Poor old man!" she whispered, "God only knows how much you needed us—God only knows! I hope He may comfort you now—and have mercy on your poor soul." She knelt quietly and made the sign of the cross and whispered a "Hail Mary," her eyes still on the dead countenance. "Who knows what thoughts were in your mind and heart when the Lord sent His pitying angel," she said in a gentle voice. "God rest you, and shorten your time of atonement."

And then from her prayer for the dead she left to comfort the living.

She knew she could depend upon her mother. Mrs. Craig was no hysterical, incapable creature, and although, in the first dreadful shock of the realization of her father's end, she had turned to Hildegarde, her daughter was fully satisfied she would rise to the need of her. So she went in very gently, and crossing to her mother's side, stood over her. Mrs. Craig looked up.

"He is dead, Hildegarde?"

"Yes, dear mother. Mary Patterson and I carried him in and laid him on his bed, and now I have sent her for the undertaker. I am so sorry, dear. But think how good it is that we got here now. God sent us when we could be of use."

"Hildegarde, I wonder what evil fortune has happened to Lady's Hall?" said the mother. "Everywhere one looks one can see nothing but neglect and ruin. Even that boy I saw—that Larry Denton I told you of last month—did not say a word. In all my dreams of the future I never imagined anything like this. My father was a wealthy man—and I know he was a sensible man. All his money was safely invested, in so far as I, a girl of twenty-one, was capable of understanding. I often heard him talk things over with Uncle Luke, and when uncle would urge him to go

into this or that speculation he used to laugh at him.

"‘I know what I have,’ he used to say; ‘no one is sure of the things you speak of. Come what will, Luke, real estate is good enough for me.’

"So, Hildegarde, I can not understand this desolation at all. I was looking about me as I went through the hall. Why it is distressingly dirty. I don't believe the halls have been brushed down in years. And look upstairs—everything sogloomy, and so unclean. It chilled me through. Imagine Lady's Hall, the toast of the neighborhood for its beauty and hospitality, coming to such a pass."

Hildegarde was silent. The mother's voice was trembling.

"And what about Lady's Hall, and all its former glory," she continued; "when I think of father—of that poor, poor old man, living here alone—I daresay hungry often, for that woman does not seem over-kind. Alone, and I thinking him harsh and cruel—when perhaps the poor old man did not even know I was in existence. Chances are," she finished bitterly, "that he never received a line from me."

"The chances are just that, mother," said Hilde-

garde. "It is cruel to think of, but we must face it. Do you know who this woman is?"

"No," answered Mrs. Craig, "and now, Hildegard, that we have made this terrible discovery, I must tell you something which I have always kept from you, knowing your disposition. It is five years ago this very month that I met Uncle Luke."

"Met Uncle Luke—grandfather's brother?"

"Yes, dear. He is living in New York—you knew that. But this day I met him face to face, and in spite of the years that had elapsed, we recognized each other immediately. He," she hesitated, and a slight color flushed her face, "was very cold and insolent, but I was too anxious to hear something from Lady's Hall to mind him. I stopped him, and only his dread of making a scene kept him from running away from me. I told him frankly that I wrote to my father two or three times a year, but that I never received an answer. He replied that he knew it, intimating that my father did not care to have anything to do with me. I let that pass, although it hurt, and inquired about his health, which he told me was excellent. It was shortly after that I was taken so ill—"

"Dr. Burt said it was from fretting! Oh, mother!" put in Florence. "And not to tell us!"

"My dears, you would only scold me for worrying over what could not be helped. But really, children, it did hurt me very much—I think this touch of heart trouble dates from that time. He was so cold to me, and I was so anxious to get just one little word from father—you know how I used to pray to hear from him. But I was afraid to go—the chance of being able to write seemed a blessing when I thought of what my possible reception might be. Uncle Luke told me he was in good spirits, had an excellent housekeeper, and had evidently forgotten he ever had a daughter. And, he added, brutally enough, that he should know, for he had been at Lady's Hall only the preceding week."

"Poor mother! To suffer it alone," said Hildgarde, gently.

"Well, it hurt me, children. Father never trusted Uncle Luke very much, in fact, had little love for him, and it seemed hard to me that I was shut out from the house where I was born, and the man whom father cared so little for in the past could go and come as he pleased. Perhaps my pride was hurt as well as my heart," smiling piti-



fully; "I always had a share of it, you know, Hildegarde."

"You are the meekest woman in the world," said Hildegarde; "I wish *I* had met him—or been with you."

"No, dear. I did not detain him very long, and I gave him no occasion to pity me. He made no inquiries concerning my family—I asked nothing about his. We parted as we met—coldly and at odds."

She sank back in her chair, a sigh parting her lips. What her girls could do to comfort her they did, Florence holding her more tightly in her arms, Hildegarde touching her hair and cheek with gentle fingers.

"Mother," she said at last, "don't you think we ought to look around before that woman comes back? It's no use going to grandfather yet. You can do him no good now, and nothing can be done for him until the undertaker comes."

"I would rather stay here, Hildegarde," said the mother, faintly.

"No, dear," urged Hildegarde. "Why should you stay and brood? Come, you will remember the old place as it was, and be able to see much that we could never observe. Who knows what

may be here to give us enlightenment? See—it isn't dark by any means yet. Let us go upstairs and look around. Will you be afraid to stay alone, Florence?"

"I should be a little bit nervous, I think," said Florence, "but if you would rather——"

"It makes no difference—only that I don't want you to tire yourself."

"If I am tired, I'll come back again."

She smiled brightly enough, and Hildegarde led the way from the room. They went slowly up the stairs.

## CHAPTER IV.

## DISCOVERIES.

MRS. CRAIG moved almost painfully, and a deep sigh parted her lips.

"I wish you could have seen this place, my girls, the day I went away from it to join your father," she whispered; "leaving my own, not knowing he would never speak to me again."

She did not cry—her eyes were tearless. The shock had been so overwhelming that she did not grasp the full pain of it. She moved like a woman in a dream, with a strange look in her eyes. She glanced about the dusty hall, into the darkened rooms which Hildegarde threw open, and made no comment. They had plainly never been used. There was nothing visible but neglect. Whatever beauty might have once been theirs the years had swallowed. The satin furniture and painted walls were hidden under a veil of dust. Even the pictures were barely to be seen through the same

covering. Hildegarde's lips tightened as she saw all this.

"I wish I knew the truth," she said, "the actual truth and condition of affairs."

"That room at the end of the hall," said Mrs. Craig suddenly, "was called Our Lady's Room. My grandfather had the greatest devotion to the Blessed Virgin, so much so that he had this room set apart—in those days Cliffden was a poor little country village and had no resident priest—to hold devotions to the Mother of God. Occasionally a missionary read Mass for us, and all the Catholics came here to attend it. But every night and every morning we had our prayers, and with his own hand the good old man used to ring the Angelus. My father did not keep up the practice—"

But at that very moment, like the faint and beautiful echo of a silver-tongued bell, came the first chime of the Angelus, ringing through the silent house. It seemed very faint and far-off, so that it could scarcely be heard on the floor below. To the three people there it seemed supernatural. Mrs. Craig recovered herself first.

"Children, children!" she said, with a sob, "it is the Angelus! O God, I thank Thee for this first

sign of welcome shown to me in Lady's Hall! O God, I thank Thee!"

And standing she made the sign of the cross, and while the little bell rang on, they said the mystical, beautiful words in low tones, standing in reverent silence a full two minutes after the last vibration had passed away. Then, with her arm about her mother, Hildegarde threw open the door of the room, and they stood upon its threshold.

It was heartbreaking to Mrs. Craig to see this room, around which clustered so many incidents of her happy girlhood, but it was comforting, too. For here there was scarcely a trace of the neglect so evident in the rest of the mansion. Unskillfully cared for, it was true, but nevertheless clean. The statue of the Mother of God gleamed white and spotless from its shrine. The pictures on the wall—religious subjects all, some of them of great value, were free from dust. The prie-dieus were clean, and the one placed before that beautiful figure showed signs of great use, and on it a heaped up rosary seemed to have fallen from a hand that had just used it. In a niche in the wall near the door was a tiny clock, surmounted by a silver bell. By some contrivance it was set

so as to ring the Angelus at the appointed hour.

"Then father did not forget," said Mrs. Craig, falling on her knees, and laying her head on the worn prie-dieu. "Father did not forget."

And the tears came then—a gush of tears that cleared away the mists stealing over her tired brain. Hildegard and Florence stood beside her, pitiful and gentle, but wise enough to let nature have its way.

"Forgive me, children," she said at last, "but it was a relief to cry. I will try to be calm now. The sight of the dear old room was too much for me."

"Let us go downstairs," said Hildegard, gently. "Do not stay any longer here. Besides, the woman may return, and while we have a perfect right—what are you doing, Florence?"

Florence looked up, half-ashamed and a little surprised.

"Perhaps the old room has an effect on me, too," she said, "but do you see that green vase?"

She pointed to where it stood among other empty vases at the feet of the statue. The last lingering rays of the twilight hour seemed to

strike it and send out a green sparkle. It looked as if it were cut from a solid emerald.

"I see it," said Hildegarde, "but what of it?"

"I feel that I can not leave this room unless I take that with me."

"Florence!" said Hildegarde, not without alarm, for she knew her sister's state of health, and dreaded all morbid impressions. "Come away at once. Mother, you can return to-morrow. This room is too much for all of us."

Florence smiled and turned to obey. But as they reached the door, she clasped her mother's arm.

"Dearest," she said, "I am not a bit nervous—see for yourself. But something is telling me not to leave this room without that vase. Hilda, do give way to me in this, won't you? If I were afraid or excited I should not ask it."

Hildegarde paused.

"You know what I think of most of your impressions, Florence," she said, "but I don't see any harm in this. She may take it, mother?"

"Yes," said the mother hesitatingly, "but afterward—"

"I promise to give it to you immediately if its possession excites me," said Florence, calmly

enough; "only let me take it now. Why, it seems to me as if a voice were whispering in my ear, 'Don't leave the green vase, don't leave the green vase.' "

She went back, picked up the small treasure and hugged it to her tightly. It was not more than six inches high, very slender, and with no opening at the top or bottom, seeming cut from a solid piece of some green iridescent glass. Hildegard looked grave when she saw Florence's look of triumph, but glad to get them away from this room of haunting memories, she followed them out and closed the door behind her. They went downstairs. The great parlor was as all the other rooms had been, dismantled and fallen into decay. Back of it was the library, which showed nothing now but empty shelves. On the other side of the hall were the rooms that had been the reception and dining-rooms. One of these they knew as Mary Patterson's bedroom, the other the Squire's. They did not venture further.

"Let us rest here," said Hildegard, when they entered Mary Patterson's room once more; "we have seen enough, and we have our plans to discuss. Mother, we have found Lady's Hall, its owner dead, all traces of his wealth vanished.



There must be some explanation of all this, and there is only one man can furnish it."

Mrs. Craig looked at her inquiringly.

"You mean?"

"I mean that Luke Brevoort, the man who lied to you five years ago—for he lied, mother, as sure as he was a living man—must know more about this than any one else. He owes what knowledge he possesses to you, whether he dislikes you or not. If he was in communication with Lady's Hall, he knew its condition."

"Well, dear?"

"We must send a telegram to him, announcing his brother's death."

"But I do not know his address."

"This woman does. We will get it from her—force it from her, if needs be—" She broke off hurriedly, and going over to the side of the bed, pulled out a sheet of paper, the corner of which just protruded beyond the mattress.

"I thought so—I imagined I knew that paper," said Hildegarde, and her voice shook. "Here is your last letter to grandfather."

"My—last—letter!" cried Mrs. Craig in horror.

Hildegarde slipped her hand still further under

the mattress, and pulled out other sheets of paper.

"And others," she said. "I dare say, if we investigated, we should discover every one of them. But this is enough to confront her with. Probably your father never read a line from you, never saw a word. God knows how you were misrepresented."

"Hildegarde, isn't this frightful!"

"Frightful or not, we'll have to see it through to the bitter end." She spoke with great anger in her voice. "That creature has no weak or broken-down old man to contend with now. She has a woman with a will as strong as her own."

"What do you mean to do?" asked Florence.

"I intend to find out who instructed her to confiscate these letters; who paid her her salary—and if she doesn't answer me, I shall have both her and Luke Brevoort arrested. I want to get at the bottom of this mystery, for as sure as we sit here alive to-day, there is a black mystery underneath it all."

A painful silence fell over them, which lasted until Mary Patterson entered the room, followed by a small, kindly-looking, gray-haired man.

"You are the undertaker?" inquired Mrs. Craig.

"Yes, madam—Jerome Dunley at your service."

"This lady," nodding at Mary Patterson, "has told you why you are required?"

"Yes, madam."

"Let me take him to grandfather," said Hildegard, rising slowly. "Will you follow me, sir? No, mother—stay here, do please. You have gone through enough to-day. Stay with Florence. Miss Patterson," with quiet coldness, "will accompany us."

When they reached the room in which the Squire's body lay, Hildegard stood up beside the corpse, straight and tall and pale.

"I did what I could for him," she said, "and now I leave you to do the rest. You are a Catholic?"

"Yes, miss," said the man. He was struck by the bearing of this beautiful young woman—it was such a mixture of pride and sadness.

"At least we came in time to close his eyes," she said, "and that was a blessing. Do you know the room called Our Lady's on the next floor?"

"I have heard of it," he said.

"Miss Patterson will show it to you. We wish him laid out there——"

"Mr. Brevoort won't permit it," interrupted Mary Patterson; "leave him where he is."

"I am this man's grandchild, and I am liable to you for any trouble I may have to give you," said Hildegarde, slowly. "Put him in Our Lady's Room, see that everything is done in accordance with our customs. He will be buried with a requiem Mass the day after to-morrow—I shall go to the parish church and arrange for it early in the morning. We will now leave you, sir."

She bent her stately head, and making a sign to Mary Patterson, left the room. The woman followed her with an ill grace indeed. The undertaker called his assistant, and closed the door behind them.

"I would like to see you where, if you raised your voice, it might not be heard," said Hildegarde, standing in the hall. "I have something of importance to say to you."

"You needn't mind saying anything to me—I'll take no orders from any one."

"I shouldn't dream of giving you an order," said Hildegarde. "Come—it will be better for you and for your reputation if you take me where I can talk to you unheard. If not, I shall open

this door again, and allow that man in there and his assistant to hear all I have to say."

Muttering and grumbling, Mary Patterson went down the flight of stairs into the kitchen. Here, indeed, was the first note of cheerfulness Hildegard had been able to observe in the whole house. There was a fire in the stove, and the table was set as if for supper.

"Now," said Hildegard, "we have been through this house while you were away. We did not come down here—which was, possibly, a mistake, as I have not noticed any such cleanliness anywhere—not even in the room in which you slept. But after becoming acquainted with the general neglect of the place we sat down once more to discuss matters, and I noticed a sheet of paper protruding from between the two mattresses on your bed. I pulled it out, thinking I recognized it. It was the letter which my mother sent my grandfather, and which was only received this morning.

"Running my hand still further in I pulled out two or three others—convincing proof to me that there is a great deal more under this than we have yet found out. I intend to place it in the hands of the police to-morrow, and shall telegraph for

a detective as soon as I can find an office in the morning."

Mary Patterson grew white.

"I also discovered many other things which would not console my mother much were she to be apprised of them. The appearance of comfort in that old man's room is a simulation. The rug on the floor has been laid hurriedly, the pictures hung upon the wall probably this very day, since you found out we intended to come here. I could even measure the places in your own room from which you have removed them."

She spoke scornfully, contemptuously.

"Did you imagine that we were fools, or that we were blind?" she went on. "Well, we will prove to you that we are neither. I want Luke Brevoort's address."

"How do you know I have it?" asked Mary Patterson.

"Weren't you sending to him to contradict my orders?" asked Hildegarde. "I want it, and want it now, or I shall give a story to the New York papers that will tell the tale of Lady's Hall, and bring both you and him before the public in an unenviable light. Come, give it to me."

"He will not come here—he never comes here," said Mary Patterson.

"No? Then he lies, for he told my mother he was a constant visitor. Oh, indeed, you both have done well by a helpless old man—very well, indeed, if all we hear and see is true. But you both shall pay."

Now all of this was mere guess-work on Hildegarde Craig's part—she had no more evidence of ill-treatment, and no more knowledge of Luke Brevoort's liability or responsibility in the matter than her own mother. But "conscience maketh cowards of us all," and having taken Mary Patterson's measure earlier in the day, she felt that she could conquer her. She asked no information, speaking positively, as of one who held what knowledge she desired in her grasp.

"I shall not stay in this house," panted Mary Patterson. "I've slaved myself to death in it, and worked my fingers to the bone, and now to be ordered around by a set of wandering beggars from God knows where—"

"Spare me," said Hildegarde. "I don't want to bandy words with you—and I warn you that I am not in the mood for it. Be careful. You have that address?"

Mary Patterson gave it reluctantly.

"We will want some supper," said Hildegarde, "and will sleep here until the funeral is over. If you do not care to prepare food and rooms for us, you can suit yourself. If you decide to go, I am capable of attending to it."

Mary Patterson sneered.

"The place is free to you—I shall go within the half-hour."

"Very well," said Hildegarde coldly, and turned to leave the room. As she went along the upper hall she met the undertaker's assistant, ready to leave the house.

"You are going for good?" she asked him.

"No," he said. "Mr. Dunley can't find some things he needs. I've got to bring them from the shop."

"Would it be too much trouble for you to stop at the butcher's and grocer's for me, and leave an order?" she asked, with a gracious smile. "We are strangers here, you know, and totally unacquainted with the surroundings. Yet we must eat."

"It would be no trouble at all," said the boy, won by her pleasant manner. "I guess it'll surprise 'em, all right, to get an order from Lady's Hall."

Hildegarde's brows contracted. She penciled a few items on a slip of paper, and handed it to



him. Then she went into the room where her mother and sister sat.

"Patience for a little while longer," she said, "and we will have things in some sort of shape. Mr. Dunley is with grandfather now—I have told him to put him in Our Lady's room. Mary Paterson does not care for wandering beggars, so she will shake the dust of the place from off her feet. She'd have to have pretty large feet to shake it all off. I've sent to the store for some food, and the kitchen is quite cheerful, I noticed."

"Tell us how you did it," said Mrs. Craig, her pale face lighting up under the helpful influence of her strong daughter.

"Lots of time, mother. There's a couch over there—lie down on it. I'll open this bag of ours and get into a working dress, and before the night is two hours older you'll feel that Lady's Hall is your home again. Dear mother," she bent over her and kissed her, "don't worry. It will come out as straight as a string, now, see if it doesn't."

And with these gentle words she kissed her tenderly once more, and smiled at Florence. When there was trouble or indecision, they knew how much they could depend on Hildegarde.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE GREEN VASE.

So, in the room where he had known the only comfort of his declining years, Squire Daniel Brevoort, once the richest man in the section of the country, was laid out in his last sleep. The light of the candles fell upon his noble face, upon the snowy beard on his breast. They laid him directly under the beautiful statue of Our Lady, and the sweet, sculptured face seemed touched with pity as it bent above that prostrate form. Attracted by Hildegarde's manner, Mr. Dunley had done everything in his power to show forth the majesty of death, and it was indeed mysteriously majestic in that silent, beautiful room. Across his thin white hands they twined the rosary Hildegarde had found. Looking upon him one could realize how wonderful is death—so silent he was, but his countenance, once the mirror of that departed soul, had lost none of its handsome goodness. Mr. Dunley called Hildegarde to ap-

prove his work, then he and his assistant withdrew, promising to return on the morrow, and Lady's Hall was left to relapse into its accustomed silence.

Meanwhile Hildegarde had not been idle. The tradesmen had come—glad and eager to see the interior of Lady's Hall—and she met them and paid them, and gave them her orders for the following day. Then she got supper ready, lighted the two lamps she found in the kitchen, and brought her mother and sister to the more cheerful room. Not until the mother had eaten some food would she allow her to see the dead man.

Mary Patterson had disappeared, and indeed Hildegarde gave her no thought. But as she and her mother and Florence entered Our Lady's room, they were astonished to see a dark figure moving in the light of the candles. It was the woman, clad in an old-fashioned bonnet and a light silk cape. She faced the door as they entered. So soon to be rid of her, Hildegarde resolved to treat her with a show of courtesy, deep as was her dislike.

"You came to see Mr. Brevoort?" she asked,

kindly enough. "Don't you think he looks peaceful?"

"I don't know," said Mary Patterson, harshly. "I saw enough of him alive—I have not looked at him. I want a green vase which used to stand on this table, and which the Squire said should be mine when he died."

Hildegarde looked at her, speechless with indignation.

"A green vase?" said Mrs. Craig, softly. "I think you are mistaken. The vase, if I know the one you mean, is a solid beryl—one of the rarest specimens of the stone. It was a direct heirloom in my mother's family, and as such belongs to me. But perhaps you do not mean this vase?"

"A small one it was—he gave it to me," said Mary Patterson, and her face had grown pallid.

"I am sorry—I am afraid I cannot let you have it."

"Where is it?" asked Hildegarde, now, sharply.

"Either you have taken it or your mother," said Mary Patterson, "and it's mine. I sha'n't leave Lady's Hall until you give it to me."

"I can assure you that neither I have it, nor

my mother," said Hildegarde, contemptuously. "and now please leave us."

"But if you haven't it, it must be here," said Mary Patterson. "It was here this morning—I looked. I looked every morning for fear he might take some notion and hide it away. And I want it—I want that green vase."

"What a creature!" said Hildegarde. "Let us hold no further conversation with her, mother—we have wasted too much time as it is."

They went to the long, narrow ice box wherein reposed their dead, and looked at his peaceful face. Then they dropped upon their knees in prayer, and remained so for many moments. Mary Patterson, with another glance about the room, gazed at Hildegarde balefully, and then withdrew. A great weight seemed lifted from them at her going. Hildegarde raised her head to listen: yes, she heard the closing of the outer door quite plainly, and then the clicking of the gate. Mary Patterson had really taken her departure.

\*      \*      \*      \*      \*

It may be interesting, perhaps, to follow her as she walked along the quiet, lovely road, bright

with the light of moon and stars, the summer dew falling softly on the sleeping flowers, all nature in its beauty but the reflection of the power of that most wonderful God, who has planted trees and flowers, and given moon and stars in their glory to His undeserving creatures. She was muttering to herself as she walked—a restless creature entirely out of touch with the calm and holy peacefulness of the night. When the lights of the village began to glimmer through the trees, she walked more quickly. She had gone the same road once before that day, and to the same place.

She paused in front of a small shop which bore the name of Dunley in gilt letters on the glass window. All was dark within, but Mary Patterson made her way to the rear. Here a small ray of light shone through the shuttered windows. She knocked heavily.

There was the sound of some one stirring, and a man's voice called hastily, "Who's there?"

"Mary Patterson from the Hall," she answered.

Mr. Dunley himself, evidently on the point of disrobing, opened the door to her. His feet were thrust into slippers, his collar was off, and his suspenders hung down his back.

"Mary Patterson!" he exclaimed in alarm. "What is the matter? What has happened?"

She laughed drily.

"Oh, nothing of much importance to any one but myself. I've left Lady's Hall."

"You've left— Come in, come in," said the man, hastily. "Can I do anything for you?"

"Perhaps nothing—perhaps a great deal," she answered, as she entered; "yes, I've been cast out of Lady's Hall, penniless, without thanks or by your leave. Every penny I had in the world went to the maintenance of that old man, and now— Do you think you'll get your money from that hussy, Jerome Dunley? Well, you can thank your lucky stars if you see a penny of it."

"Yes?" he asked. "I don't know about that. She looked like a straightforward young girl, and before I left she handed me three ten-dollar bills as a retainer, she said. That looks like business, says Dunley—and I treat people as they treat me."

Mary Patterson snorted, but made no comment on his words.

"There's a thing I came to ask you," she said abruptly. "Who's that youngster you've got helping you?"

"Joseph? He is the son of an old friend from Worcester, who wants to learn the business."

"He's honest?"

"As the day itself."

"You're positive of that?"

"As sure as I am of my own honesty. But why?"

"The young lady's ma missed an heirloom—a small green vase which used to be kept in the room where you put the old man. She's much distressed, and I said I'd drop in to see and ask you about it. Maybe you mislaid it somewhere. Can you remember it? It was about so high," indicating with her fingers, "and a sort of green glass. I thought maybe you might have picked it up and put it aside."

"We can easily settle that," said Mr. Dunley. He went to the door of an inner room, and called.

"Are you awake, Joseph?"

"Yes, sir."

"At the Hall to-day, can you remember if we saw a green vase anywhere—or put it away? It was in the big room where we laid the body out."

"I didn't see no green vase—didn't see no kind of a vase," was the sleepy response.

Mary Patterson looked much disappointed.



"Well, if he didn't, he didn't," she said. "Serves her right if she don't find it. She's got a cheek, coming into a house where she's had no say for the last twenty-five years and turning them out that have been doing more than their duty. Not a cent have I to show for over—"

"Come off," said Dunley; "my son ain't post-master at Cliffden for nothing, and though we let you have your own little story in this here town—considering you're a Catholic like ourselves, even if you are a mighty poor one—we kept our mouth shut. We know you've been getting a money order every first of the month from Luke Brevoort—enough for your salary and to keep the old man. I'll bet he ain't ever saw much of it. Don't come the sympathy act on me, Mary Patterson. I know you too well, and if it's no harm to tell you I ain't forgot how you done me on that potato deal last year. You're a big cheat as well as a big liar, and though I don't like to use hard words to a lady, they're yours and you're welcome to 'em. Don't be talking to me of sacrifice and poverty. You're so stingy that you'd keep each dollar you have in a separate box, for fear even they'd get to know you have more than one! Don't you talk to me, ma'am. Good-night."

He ushered her to the door, and in hot but speechless anger she passed out into the darkness. Retribution was falling fast on Mary Patterson's head.

She went next to the telegraph office. The message she sent read like this: "To Luke Brevoort, —Fifth Ave., New York City.

"The Squire is dead. His daughter here. Have been sent away. Can not find green vase. Please wire at once, care of Mrs. Palmer."

Marking it "Collect" she left the office and went to a small farmhouse near-by, where she asked permission to sit and wait for a telegram. Mrs. Palmer, in common with most of Cliffden, did not like Mary Patterson, but respected her for what she imagined she had done for the lonely old Squire of Lady's Hall. So that here the woman could pour out her tale, sure of an eager listener, and the doings of Mrs. Craig and her two daughters lost nothing in the recital of that day's woes.

"I've got a little here to pay my way," she added at the close, "and I'm willing to pay it, Mrs. Palmer. I may have to stay here to-night if the telegram from my friend doesn't come."

"You needn't think I'd take a penny from you, Mary Patterson." said Mrs. Palmer. "I'd be

sorry not to do a little for one that's wasted all her life caring for a man that wasn't so much as able to raise a finger for himself."

"I considered it my duty," said Mary Patterson.

"Well, I don't think it was—but that's neither here nor there. Each one knows his own business best—you among the others."

The telegram did not come until morning. Mary Patterson was up at five o'clock waiting for it. And when it did arrive, it sent her into another rage.

"Go back and search for green vase. Don't come without it."

While she was turning the yellow slip of paper over and over in her fingers, Mrs. Palmer entered the room. There was a peculiar expression on her face.

"A gentleman out here would like to see you, Mary Patterson. I'll send him right in—I reckon you'll like to be alone with him."

Mary Patterson's face lighted up expectantly. Perhaps Luke Brevoort had changed his mind since the sending of the telegram. But the burly, gray-headed man who followed Mrs. Palmer, his sturdy face redder than even the warmth

of that summer day warranted, was very different to the Luke Brevoort she remembered, and whom she had seen in his own house less than a year before.

"Oh, it's you, Tom Phelps," she said, somewhat coldly, for her mind was in a perplexed condition, and she scarcely knew which way to turn.

"It's me, Mary Patterson," said the countryman in a big, husky voice. "I've heard you left the Hall up yonder."

He pointed his big thumb over one shoulder to indicate the place she had left.

"Yes," she said, "I've left it."

"Been shown the door, they do say hereabouts."

"Yes," answered Mary.

"Kind o' hard on ye after all that long service to be turned out at ye're time of life," said the farmer blunderingly.

"I'm still able to earn my own living," said Mary Patterson, with some asperity. She had no time at that particular moment for her middle-aged lover.

"Right smart and peart you do be," said Tom Phelps, "but there ain't no call for ye to be thinkin' of earnin' ye're own livin'. I'm a plain man, Mary Patterson, in need of a woman to see

to my house an' farm. If so be ye can make up ye're mind, I'm here to marry ye out of hand."

"This is no time for me to be thinking of marriage, Tom Phelps," said Mary Patterson, too long used to being her own mistress to take kindly to the somewhat patronizing note in his voice.

"It's about time ye did, now, if ye're ever goin' to," he said with a laugh. "I've come to town this morning with a load of green stuff for Mr. Dickerman, the grocer. I'll give it to him, an' in the meantime you can be gettin' ready, and we'll go off to the parsonage, an' have the minister tie us up. Or, if ye'd like it better, ye can go to the priest of your own church. I have no objections."

His somewhat flippant manner, his assertiveness, did not harmonize with Mary Patterson's irascible temper. She flared up into a white heat.

"I'm not in that hurry to be married that I'll snap up any man," she said indignantly, "so don't be so sure of me, Tom Phelps. I haven't made up my mind to take you or not."

An expression of blank amazement shot down over the farmer's honest face. He stared at her.

"Oh, ho, ye ain't made up ye're mind to have me! So that's it!" He turned on his heel and walked toward the door. Too late Mary Patter-

son saw the dire mistake she had made in thus displeasing the sturdy farmer.

"If you'll come in to-morrow maybe I'll have a different answer for you," she said in a milder voice.

Tom Phelps paused with his hand on the knob.

"Me an' young Tom's mother got along in double harness for forty year," he said slowly. "She was a young and pretty gal when I knew her fust, an' I reckon I felt what 'twas to keer a bit in them days. But I gev her no more notice than I gev you, an' she tuk me. She's been under sod eight year come Christmas, an' I reckon I can get along without another wife until I jines her. Me an' young Tom kin manage purty well as 'tis, but it seemed a bit of a pity to hev a woman like ye thrown out in the world. That's neither here nor there, Mary Patterson. You an' me kin be good friends, but it's just as well mebbe that the deal's off."

He spoke quite kindly, nodded in benignant fashion, and was gone, leaving a stupefied woman behind him. She had certainly overreached herself. With burning heart she paced up and down the floor, muttering savagely, and threatening all sorts of evil to people whom she did not name.

Mary Patterson was finding that the road to matrimony which she had sneered at was not to be trodden by her feet. For she knew old Tom Phelps well; once he made an assertion he meant to stick to it.

Mrs. Palmer came in later. With the air of a diplomat, Mary Patterson sought to recover the ground she had lost.

"I'm that put about," she said; "I sent a telegram to Mr. Luke Brevoort, the Squire's brother, telling him that he was dead, that his daughter has come, and that I left the Hall. He wires back that I must return to the Hall, and stay there till after the funeral. Maybe, if he comes himself he'll do something for me."

"Maybe he will," said Mrs. Palmer, consolingly. "He must mean to do something or he wouldn't send you a message like that. Well, if you want any one's help, Mary, I guess all Cliffden will give you a good word."

"Thanks, Mrs. Palmer—I'm sure it will. But I hate to go back there to where they are. Yet it seems Mr. Brevoort doesn't like to trust 'em."

"It's all in the family," said honest Mrs. Palmer. "*He* hasn't bothered his head much. You seem to be the only one that's had to do that."

"And on top of my worry comes Tom Phelps asking me to marry him out of hand," went on Mary; "which, of course, I couldn't do, seeing how things are. He's gone off in a huff, and I dare say'll never look at me again."

"Tom Phelps is a queer old chap, Mary Patterson, but you could do much worse than to marry him."

"I know that well—but what time is this to be asking me—when I'm in trouble to my eyes! Men have no sense."

"Not a bit, not a bit," said Mrs. Palmer; "but never mind. He'll come back your way again."

"Well, indeed, he can if he chooses," said Mary Patterson, her acrid temper rising again as her thoughts reverted to the ordeal still in store for her at Lady's Hall. "I'll not go weeping for him, I can tell you."

"And I can tell you," said Mrs. Palmer, "and no offense is meant, if you please—that men are like flies. Catch 'em with molasses—not vinegar."

"I wouldn't put myself about for the best man ever walked," said Mary Patterson.

"You may not be asked," said Mrs. Palmer, drily. Even her easy good nature found Mary Patterson's narrowness trying. "But old Tom



Phelps is among the best of his kind—and he is worth a little consideration. I wouldn't give him too much of the sour side of *my* face if I were in your shoes, Mary."

With which expression she closed the conversation by leaving the room, and the woman it contained sank into a chair, fuming. Thinking little of Mrs. Palmer's words, indeed—rather of that telegram and the humiliation it forebode for her.

## CHAPTER VI.

## MARY PATTERSON'S RETURN TO LADY'S HALL.

THE next morning, when Jerome Dunley visited Lady's Hall, Hildegarde made a few inquiries. She liked this small, gray-headed man, and felt no embarrassment at having to ask him questions—which was a rare thing for Hildegarde, since she would never ask questions if she could avoid it. Then she called on Father Huntley.

He had not known the Squire of Lady's Hall very well, he said, being but a recent comer to the parish. His predecessor had spoken highly of the old man's ardent faith, in spite of the difficulties which attended his practice of it. He was old and feeble, and practically helpless, so that attendance at Mass was out of the question. He had called upon him three times since his coming to Cliffden but only managed to see him once, as he found the caretaker—so he designated Mary Patterson—a most disagreeable and unpleasant woman.

The priest was surprised to hear of the Squire's death, and much grieved that he had not been called to administer the last sacraments. His visit to him had occurred about six weeks before, and although he was then a bit nervous and wandering, he did not seem in any immediate danger of death.

The priest's sympathetic words inspired Hildegard with confidence. She told him of her intention of having him hold a requiem, and even touched lightly on her own affairs, and the motive that had prompted their coming to Lady's Hall. And also that, on account of Florence's health, her mother had resolved to stay at the Hall after the interment of the Squire.

Father Huntley expressed himself as well-pleased, and also assured her that he would call on them at an early date.

After this interview the girl went to the telegraph office, where she sent a message to her uncle, informing him of his brother's death. She signed it with her mother's name. This done, she felt that a great burden had been lifted from her shoulders, and she turned her face toward home—unconsciously thinking of Lady's Hall as home. She really liked the big neglected place. Its large

rooms, after the stuffiness of the city, appealed to her artistic sense, for practical as she undoubtedly was, Hildegarde Craig had the artistic temperament. So heavily did present-day needs rest upon her now, however, that she was not wasting precious moments over Lady's Hall, or the beautiful country about her. Her eyes had a far-away look. She had three hundred dollars in her possession, and with part of that money she had planned to take a vacation that was an absolute necessity after her hard winter's work. She had meant her mother and Florence to accompany her, until Lady's Hall had presented itself to Mrs. Craig. After that she had resolved to leave the half of it with her mother and sister, so that they need not be dependent upon the Squire, and to curtail her vacation to a fortnight instead of a month.

And here her cherished plans were made entirely impossible. She had no idea what the cost of a funeral might be—she had a vague notion that such things took a lot of money. Lady's Hall was not habitable. Most of the rooms must be kept closed even as they were then, but the others had to be overhauled and given a thorough renovation. She saw nothing for it but a return

to her daily lesson-giving, and that as soon as possible.

But first her grandfather must be decently interred, and then she must find some one to help her mother. Well, that would be easily done, she imagined. And then she remembered Luke Brevoort. She wondered what he was like, and what aspect his coming might put upon the whole affair.

"Never cross a bridge until you reach it," she said half-aloud. "I may not have to do any of this if he comes. I wonder what his circumstances are—mother did not tell me that. Is he rich or poor? The former, I imagine."

When she reached Lady's Hall she was greatly astonished to find that Mary Patterson appeared in answer to her knock.

"You here?" she ejaculated.

"Yes," answered the woman, looking at her with a glance in which defiance and humility were strangely mingled. "I've come back to see if I could be of some use, seeing you are strangers in the place, and your mother has said that I can stay."

"She pleaded so hard, Hilda," said her mother, "and it is really necessary to have some one like

that here. You can't be poking down in that kitchen cooking for us—"

"I don't think you would have heard me complain," said Hildegarde, gently as she could, for she was very much annoyed. "However, she is here now, and I suppose we will have to allow her to remain. I am very sorry."

She treated Mary Patterson with marked coldness all that day, but Mary Patterson was proving herself invaluable. Whatever her faults as a care-taker, she was a good cook, and she took the burden of household drudgery from Mrs. Craig and her two daughters. Only Hildegarde did not trust her.

"She has come back for some purpose of her own," she said, "and I would very much like to know what it is. One thing, Florence," the two girls were alone, the mother having gone to sit a few hours in the Lady's Room; "she has an object in getting that green vase, and I want you to give it to me until she is safely out of the way. I can feel more secure about you if I have it."

Florence went to her dressing case and drew out the green vase. Both girls stood looking at it. The sun was shining down on it, and it seemed to glow like a living spark of green fire.

"It is a beautiful thing, isn't it?" said Florence. "I am glad it belongs to mother—I should not like to take it if it were grandfather's."

"And why not?" demanded Hildegarde.

"Oh, I don't know. It being mother's makes it so much more ours—"

Hildegarde, with a swift movement, covered the vase with her palm and dropped her hand down at her side. Raising the other hand she pointed out of the window.

"Wouldn't you think the tops of those trees were aflame?" she said in an ordinary tone. "It makes one long to climb up those mountains, doesn't it, Florence? I beg your pardon!"

She turned an astonished face on Mary Patterson, who was at her elbow.

"I knocked, but I guess you didn't hear me," said the woman, in a somewhat confused tone. "Mr. Dunley told me before he left to ask you if you would please see to the candles in the Lady's Room and not let them burn down."

Hildegarde smiled.

"I suppose you overheard him saying that to me?" she retorted. "It was scarcely necessary to repeat it twice, Mary. And, by the way," carelessly, "if you come across that green vase of

which we were speaking yesterday, I wish you would let me have it. We understand that it contains something of great value—but only to my mother, my sister, and me. It would be perfectly useless to any one else. If you can find it, and give it to me, I will gladly pay you for your trouble."

Mary Patterson looked at her. The lovely dark face was slightly flushed, the eyes were dancing. With all her heart Mary Patterson hated Hildegard Craig, who seemed to read every thought that was in her mind.

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When morning came, the Squire of Lady's Hall was borne to the church. There was the hearse and two carriages, the second carriage occupied by Mary Patterson in solitary grandeur. Right willingly, in spite of her superstitious fancies, would she have stayed behind and made a search for the missing treasure. But Hildegard Craig would not hear of this, and the woman was compelled to follow to the grave the man whom she had so neglected and ill-used.

Luke Brevoort did not appear, nor did Hildegard allow any delay because of his probable



arrival. The little church at Cliffden was crowded with Protestants as well as Catholics, many attending merely out of curiosity to see the Squire's daughter and her children.

And although Mrs. Craig's face was hidden, Hildegard and Florence might be gazed at with impunity. They were quiet and collected, and though people might stare at them curiously there was nothing to be read in either of their young countenances. Father Huntley finished the Mass, and unvested in time to be present as the body was lowered into the grave. He read a few prayers, and then coming up to Mrs. Craig, spoke to her consolingly. Hildegard presented her sister. Florence, shy as a rule, and embarrassed with strangers, melted under the cordial manner of the priest. She looked after him as he turned away, and then suddenly and hastily turned her head, blushing a deep crimson.

For a young man had stepped up to Father Huntley's side, and even while he stopped to speak to him, his eyes sought Florence with such an expression of admiration that she, meeting those eyes full, and reading them aright, felt the blood mount in a wave to her forehead. No one noticed this little by-play, however. The three women

reentered the carriage, and were driven back to Lady's Hall, Mary Patterson following.

And Mary Patterson was almost in despair. Search where she might—and many had been her opportunities—the green vase was not to be found. What to do she knew not. She dared not go to Luke Brevoort until she had done everything in her power to find it. She had always kept close vigil on it, and the only reason she had not taken it away altogether, was because the Squire had looked upon it with jealous eyes. Once she had hidden it for a whole day, but his moans and cries had frightened her so that she was forced to put it back upon the little table where it belonged.

She was in absolute ignorance as to why Luke Brevoort wanted it. Her impression, however, was that it was cut from a stone of great value, and that it was for this reason she was bidden to keep such a strict watch on it. Two days of Hildegard Craig as mistress, however, were all that she could stand, she felt. The girl had such a peculiar way of looking at her, half-mocking, half-questioning, wholly penetrating. Yes, she hated Hildegard Craig.

And Hildegard Craig cared little whether she

did or not. She had a great wish to be rid of this woman whom she so much distrusted, and she told her mother so. Furthermore, when Mr. Dunley came up on the evening of the day on which the Squire was buried—at Hildegarde's request—she had a conversation with him that confirmed her in her resolution to get rid of Mary Patterson at once.

The bill, which she discovered amounted to less than ninety dollars—very reasonable, indeed—was a great relief to Hildegarde. She had had, in her ignorance of such matters, seen the most of her little savings swept away. Mr. Dunley receipted his statement and then, as he folded the money and put it in his pocket he lowered his voice.

"You people intend to stay here?" he asked in his kindly fashion.

"My mother and sister do," said Hildegarde.

"And you're going to keep that critter—that Patterson woman?"

"No," said Hildegarde, decidedly, "we are not. I wish I knew of some nice young girl to leave here when I go away. I'd prefer one who had no experience, so long as she was quiet and lady-like, and would be able to talk to Florence, and go out with her "

Mr. Dunley looked at her, keenly.

"Mary Patterson don't fill the bill, then?"

Hildegarde lifted her eyebrows.

"Miss Patterson, no doubt, is very good and capable, but we do not care for her," she answered somewhat coldly.

"There's a widow woman I know—a good soul, a cousin of the Phelps—ever heard of the Phelps?"

Hildegarde shook her head.

"Fine men—father and son—old Tom and young Tom, they call 'em. This widow has one girl, Lucy. She'd be glad, maybe, to let Lucy come, if you'd like a quiet girl o' that sort around. I know them both well—the girl since she was a baby. And she's a nice little thing."

"If you will tell me where she lives, I'll go to see her," said Hildegarde.

He gave her the address, and then stood staring at her with the same keen look.

"You're no fool," he said, with some admiration. "I guess it would take two or three like Mary Patterson to pull the wool over your eyes. Tell you what, young lady—and Jerry Dunley isn't one to waste much words over anybody—Mary Patterson 'll never bring luck no matter

where she goes. She's a selfish, narrow old maid, as hard as nails."

And, although Hildegarde vouchsafed no response to this, she thought of it afterward, and smiled at Jerry Dunley's characterization of the woman. Early the next morning she went to call on the "widow woman," Mrs. Hardy, and was so prepossessed in favor of her daughter, Lucy, that she engaged her on the spot.

"Now, mother," she said to Mrs. Craig, when she returned, "Lucy will be here in the morning, and as you allowed Mary Patterson to come back, it might look better if you were to send her away. We can not afford to keep her, in the first place, and, in the second, I can't rest easy until I see the last of her."

"I'll tell her, then, that she can go in the morning. It's too late to turn one out to-night," said Mrs. Craig. "She isn't really so bad, Hilda, as you imagine her."

"I suppose not," said Hildegarde; "I suppose I'm prejudiced, but I can not help it. I not only wish that she was out of Lady's Hall, but out of this part of the country."

"Isn't it strange, Hilda," said Florence, "that I rather like her?"

"It is," said Hildegarde, frankly. "For I can see nothing to like in her—not even an excuse for liking her. And you know I'm always willing to make that."

"Yes," said the mother, thoughtfully, "you are. Perhaps it is as well we are sending her away. Really this continued distrust on your part makes me a little nervous."

The strain of the past few days had told sadly on Mrs. Craig. None too strong at best, she now looked wan and tired. Her efforts to bear up even before her daughters were a drain on her feeble health. Hildegarde, though she made no sign, was distressed, and wished with all her heart that her mother had never come to Lady's Hall.

"For we would have heard of grandfather's death at any rate, and I could have attended to the unpleasant part of it," said she to herself; "or devised some scheme to save her from this dreadful worry. I know that she will be ill."

"If you mind in any way, mother," she said, gently, "I will tell Mary to go. Only I did not want to seem to take authority from you. I dare say she thinks I am too much the mistress as it is."

"My dear, I do not mind at all," said Mrs. Craig. And she spoke the truth.

"Mary," she said, later, "you have been most kind to come and stay with us during our trouble, but now we feel that we can hardly afford to keep you and to pay you the wages a woman of your age and experience would expect. Miss Hildegarde has engaged a young girl from the village. You can leave any time to-morrow that will be convenient."

Mary Patterson nodded.

"Of course, you know I didn't mean to stay, anyhow," she said briefly.

"We presumed as much—my daughter and I. We are grateful to you. Miss Hildegarde asked me to give you this."

She laid a new bill on the table, and went out of the room. Mary Patterson stood scowling, looking down at the money. It was not Mary Patterson's way to refuse money, no matter what its source, but she was tempted then to leave it where it lay, and to go at once. More prudent thoughts intervened. She would wait until to-morrow, and then brave Luke Brevoort, whether he liked it or not. The finding of the green vase was impossible.

She was folding the bill and putting it in her pocket-book when the remembrance of the vase flashed into her mind. She stood up straight and a peculiar expression crossed her sharp countenance. A daring idea had come to her—a dangerous one, but one that was worth putting into execution.



## CHAPTER VII.

## THE HAND OF PROVIDENCE.

MRS. CRAIG and Hildegarde sat long that night talking over their affairs. They had much to foresee and provide for; but, as Hildegarde said, possession was nine points of the law, and no matter what claim Luke Brevoort might advance against his brother's estate, the daughter of the owner of Lady's Hall was entitled to some consideration.

"And by the time matters are settled, even if the worst happens, and it is decided that you must leave," said Hildegarde, practically, "you may have accomplished your purpose in coming. Florence's health will, with the assistance of God, be much improved. I imagine that the air has had a beneficial effect even in the short while we have been here. She seems to take more interest in things."

"Only for that notion of hers about the green vase," said Mrs Craig in a troubled voice.

"I wouldn't worry about that, now. She gave it to me the other day," said Hildegarde.

"Yes—but only this morning she asked me if I knew where you kept it, and did I think you would leave it here when you went to the city. To completely satisfy her I showed her just where it was."

"Yet she doesn't seem morbidly interested," said Hildegarde.

"No—she's like a child with a new toy. She has really become greatly attached to it."

"Of course, it is absurd to believe in such things," said Hildegarde, "but I think if grandfather was able, that he himself put the idea into her head. The green vase has something to do with our future fortunes. I feel this, though I can not explain why I feel it. I think that Patterson woman would never have returned here had it not been for the same object. She wants it, either because of its value, or because of some motive to which we have no clue. I am inclined to the latter idea."

"I don't like to talk of it, somehow," said Mrs. Craig. She looked at her watch, then. "Why, it is nearly midnight," she said, in great surprise, "and if Florence wakes and finds herself alone she

may be frightened. I think I will go to bed, Hildegarde."

"Yes," said the girl. She had taken her grandfather's bedroom, and Mrs. Craig and Florence slept in what had been Mary Patterson's room, while Mary had made a bed for herself, temporarily, in the kitchen. "To-morrow we'll change this room into a sort of sitting room, and open the doors that lead between—perhaps that little girl Lucy's mother will come up for a while and help us. We'll try to make the place as pleasant as possible. When I go back to the city," she continued, smiling, "I intend to take with me this picture of you which poor grandfather seemed to treasure so. It will remind me of Lady's Hall." She stood looking down at the picture in its silver frame. "Florence would look like this, mother, I think, if she were in good health—"

"Florence does resemble me," said Mrs. Craig. "Well, good-night, Hildegarde." She leaned over to kiss her, but even as their lips touched, Hildegarde straightened up, and listened. Her quick ear had seemed at that instant to catch the opening and shutting of a door. Involuntarily she put out her hand and turned down the light. It went out.

"Don't move," she whispered. She pulled her mother toward her, and they flattened themselves against the wall, for a hand was fumbling at the knob. Not a breath escaped them as the door swung inward, stealthily. They knew that the intruder touched the bed and found it empty, for a low chuckle reached them.

"Upstairs praying!" they heard a woman's voice mutter; "well, let them pray. Where did she say that green vase was? In Hildegarde's black bag, pinned inside her long coat. The coat was here—on this chair this morning, for I saw it—"

Hildegarde put her hand out in the darkness, and her strong fingers closed like a vise over the groping ones of Mary Patterson. A scream escaped the woman—a scream of fright and pain, for Hildegarde was strong and her grasp ungente. Still holding her tightly, the young girl led her through the doorway, and dragged her out into the hall.

"Mary Patterson," she said, in a voice of indignation and rage, "leave this house at once. Leave it now. Mother, light the lamp—" but Mrs. Craig had already struck a match, and the light flared up full on the shrinking figure, with

its white countenance, and on Hildegarde, who was truly enough to inspire fear in any guilty being as she towered above her. Her eyes were black with anger, and her face the set, resolute one of a woman who has been goaded past endurance.

"Get your things," she concluded. "Get them now— No," as Mary Patterson would have wrenched her hand free, "I want you to feel my strength, and to know that I am no weakling. Mother, go to Florence—this creature has been in her room."

"But you, dear—"

"Do you think that I am afraid—that I can't manage her?" said Hildegarde, contemptuously. "Go to Florence, mother, now—and let me see the last of Luke Brevoort's hired servant."

It was a chance shot, but it told. Mary Patterson cowered under it. Hildegarde released her, then.

"Get your things," she repeated, imperiously. "You shall leave Lady's Hall on the instant. Don't speak to me— I will listen to nothing. Nothing, do you hear?"

She was trembling with passion. To Mary Pat-

erson, guilty and thwarted, she seemed like an avenging young goddess. She spoke no word—she could neither excuse nor deny—she had been caught in the very act. A bungler at the best, depending upon luck, she found that luck is not always to be commanded. So she preceded Hildegard Craig to the kitchen, put on her hat and cape as she was bidden, and then went out. During all this Hildegard did not open her lips again, but double-bolted the door after her, and stood watching until she saw the last of her, going slowly down the road in the direction of the town. After that she tried every window and door in the basement and the first floor, to be sure that she could not force her way in.

Mrs. Craig found Florence sleeping peacefully, and nothing in the room disturbed. When Hildegard went to her mother the girl was still asleep. In a low voice Hildegard told her what she had done, and that Mary Patterson had left the house for good. Their tones, low as they were, awoke Florence, who sat up in bed and looked at them.

"You two awake yet?" she said sleepily; "why it must be near morning."

"It isn't so late," said Mrs. Craig evasively. "You've been asleep?"

"Oh, yes—and I had the strangest dream! I thought that Mary Patterson came in and made me tell her where the green vase is. I remember it distinctly." She lay down again. "Guess you'd better take it to New York with you, Hildegarde, after all, if it's going to prey on my mind."

"You were only dreaming," said Mrs. Craig, soothingly, but she and Hildegarde exchanged meaning glances.

"I'll run off to bed now, mother," said Hildegarde. "We have a lot to do to-morrow. Once more, good-night."

"I wish you'd sleep in here," said Mrs. Craig. "I don't like you to go away alone to that other room."

"Nonsense," said Hildegarde, "don't be afraid. There will be no more interruptions this night, at any rate."

She spoke truly, although neither she nor Mrs. Craig slept much. Their thoughts kept them busy. As for Hildegarde, she put the vase under her pillow, and every once in a while her hand stole toward it, so as to reassure herself. Now, more than ever, was she convinced that the green vase held a mystery.

\* \* \* \*

At the end of the week Hildegarde felt that she could leave her sister and mother. They had made the lower part of Lady's Hall livable, had thrown the two rooms into one, and as Lucy Hardy went home every night, they were not put to any trouble to make room for her. The cheerful kitchen, too, which they also used as a dining-room, was a source of comfort to Mrs. Craig. They kept the Lady's Room in order, and the Squire's daughter kept up her custom of family prayers there. To Florence the old gardens were a source of delight and she spent most of her time out of doors. Away off in the woods they found the magical Lady's well, and here, at least, Mrs. Craig suffered no disappointment, for its waters were as clear as in her childhood days.

"If only father were alive—if he had lived but a year," she said more than once; "how glad and happy it would have made me."

Hildegarde made careful inquiries about Mary Patterson before she left Cliffden. There was no trace of her—she had said she was going away to visit relatives, and would probably make her home with them. That she was not in Cliffden was positive, so Hildegarde breathed more freely.

The parting between them was very pathetic.



Somehow, Mrs. Craig clung even more than usual to her strong elder daughter, and Hildegarde herself felt that her mother needed her. But necessity called her, and she was determined enough to carry out her plans.

"I shall run down every fortnight," she said, "and even oftener, after I see how I can manage. I shall try to crowd Saturday afternoon's lessons into the other days, so that I can be free from noontime. Don't worry about me, mother, and Florence, you must keep your promise and write to me every day—no matter if it is only two lines."

Florence repeated her promise, which she intended to keep faithfully. The last Hildegarde saw of her mother she was standing with one hand on Florence's arm, her pale face turned toward the departing train, her eyes filled with tears.

From her sorrow and loving thoughts of her dear ones, Hildegarde turned with practical brain to the consideration of her future. There was still two good months of summer weather—and she had never spent August in the city, nor had she ever spent it alone. She was to struggle under new difficulties now.

But she looked down at her firm hands, and a smile curved her lips, and her eyes began to

shine. She was young, strong, capable. Florence and her mother were safely housed, and it would take little to provide them with daily bread, for neither was extravagant. She would find further opportunities of putting her talents to work—perhaps be able to give a few more concerts, or even get a chance to play dance music. She would write to several of her friends when she reached New York and tell them she was open to engagements.

That first lonely night in the city was the worst she could spend, she felt. She straightened up the little flat, wrote to her mother, ate her solitary supper. And then she drifted into the cosy parlor, which seemed no longer cosy, but unutterably gloomy. Hildegard sat in her mother's rocker, and looked at the sofa where Florence was wont to lie. Presently, and before she knew it, the tears were in her eyes, coursing down her cheeks. She shook herself impatiently.

"This will not do," she said, rising. "This is not the way to start." She lighted the tall lamp, then, and got out her music, and from that time on until eleven o'clock she practised her most difficult selections. When she went to bed she was thoroughly tired, so that her sleep until morning was unbroken.

And so for the next few days Hildegarde's life went on monotonously—only broken by Florence's long letters, and her mother's treasured scribbles. Hildegarde had written to those of her friends who would be most likely to help her, but as yet she had heard nothing from them. She took up her rounds again, however. She knew most of her pupils were looking forward to a vacation, and she found that she was dreading more and more the heat of the summer days. One thing served to lighten the burden—she had succeeded in "crowding in" the lessons which she usually gave on Saturday afternoon, and the day for her first holiday was approaching.

She had been a week away from Lady's Hall, when she received a letter bearing the Cliffden postmark. It was from her mother.

"Dear Hilda," it read, "this came to me this morning. Before answering it, I thought it best to send it on to you. Let me know what to say."

"This" was a legal-looking document marked "Copy" in large letters enclosed in brackets. It set forth, in lawyer-like phrasing, that in consideration of certain sums of money advanced during his lifetime, Daniel Brevoort promised to give to

his brother, Luke, a beryl vase which he had in his possession.

The vase was then minutely described, and the original document was signed—presumably—by Daniel Brevoort and witnessed.

And there was a request added that the three occupants of Lady's Hall, Florence Craig and her daughters, would surrender the article therein described to its rightful owner, under penalty of legal proceedings.

Hildegard sat a long time pondering over this. Now at last her suspicion was confirmed. It was Luke Brevoort who was at the bottom of Mary Patterson's frantic desire to secure the green vase.

Another letter was lying on the table. Hildegard picked it up, and opened it carelessly. It was from a musician of her acquaintance.

"Could you take a month's engagement out of the city?" was the first sentence that met her eye. "A wealthy man, Luke Brevoort by name, is looking for a good musician as companion to his daughter. I believe she is given to melancholia—he interfered with her marriage or something, and it is said she will never get over it. It is principally on her account that he has taken a large country house in the woods somewhere, and will

give no entertainments of any description. It will be very quiet, but the remuneration is handsome. He expressly stipulated that the musician must be first-class, able to play anything, and a lady. My hands are full just now, as I go to Paris in a week, and then, from what you tell me, I presume you will be glad of the opportunity.

"If you want to go, write, personally, to Mr. Luke Brevoort, Pine Bole, Vermont. You can make whatever arrangements you choose. If you don't want to go, drop me a line to that effect and I'll try to get some one else. But if I were you I'd take it, especially as his terms are so generous."

Hildegarde's face was flushed when she finished this letter. Almost as she read, a daring resolve had come into her mind. With her brain alert now, she studied the question from every point of view.

"There can be no harm in it—I am a musician," she said. "I apply for this, and say that I get it. I serve my month there, get away from the city, earn a little extra money—and perhaps solve the mystery of the green vase." She laughed aloud. It was a bold scheme, but the girl felt equal to anything at that moment.

She scribbled a note to her artist friend, ~~thank-~~

ing her, and assuring her that she would apply at once. Then she wrote a careful letter to Mr. Luke Brevoort. She sat frowning and biting the end of her pen when it came to her own signature. Then, with a quick lifting of her shoulders, she signed it "Hildegarde Gray."

She had another letter to write—that to her mother.

"Take this document and return it to Mr. Brevoort," she said. "Write him that the green vase is not in your possession—that you have never seen it since the first day you were in Lady's Hall.

"Also tell him that you can not understand why there are so many claimants for the green vase. There was a servant employed at Lady's Hall, Mary Patterson by name, who created quite a scene because she could not find it. She also insisted that Squire Brevoort had given it to her for services rendered.

"Tell him, then, that the vase was not the Squire's to give away. It belonged to your mother—was an heirloom in her family, and descended to you by inheritance. Tell him that when the vase is found it is yours, and after you, your daughters.

"We'll see what this letter will bring forth.

Now to my further news. I have been anticipating this coming Saturday, dear mother, but something wonderful has happened. Your Uncle Luke is at Pine Bole, a country house away out in Vermont, and he is endeavoring to secure the services of a competent musician as companion to his daughter. The chance came my way, and I have taken it. I have just finished a letter to him. Here it is."

She copied the letter to Luke Brevoort, then.

"I have signed this Hildegarde Gray. He need never know who I am—he probably never will. I am anxious to see him—to see what he looks like, and also see if anything can dispel this mystery. I'm like Florence, I'm afraid. The green vase has a hold on me, too, and I can't get away from it.

"Now, mother, darling, don't be disappointed. It will only last a month at most—I shall make a good sum, and perhaps can spend the last of August and some of September with you and my dear sister. I shall find some way of receiving mail at Pine Bole, if I am lucky enough to get there.

"I am talking as if Mr. Brevoort's acceptance were a matter of course. I am almost positive of it—in fact, I feel that the hand of Providence is

in this thing. Write me at once on receipt of this, as I want your approval.

"I am glad Florence is so much better. In her letter, yesterday, she asked me if I remembered the young man who was with Father Huntley the day grandfather was buried—I saw no young man with Father Huntley. Who is this Tom Phelps, mother? Does he seem to care for Florence? What do you think of him?

"If no answer comes from Mr. Brevoort by Saturday you can expect me about six o'clock in the evening. If it does I shall write again. I don't intend to lose a moment, mother dear—I am perfectly feverish to get out there.

"Dear mother, write quickly, and let me know what you think of the whole thing."



## CHAPTER VIII.

## AT PINE BOLE.

HILDEGARDE'S assurance was not misplaced. Thursday morning she received a letter in a bold, business-like hand, informing her that the writer was pleased with her application to him—that Miss Ansonby, to whom he had written first, had been highly recommended, and that he was satisfied that her friend must be fully as competent or she would not have suggested her. He also said that he would be pleased to have her at Pine Bole as soon as possible—to start that day if she could get ready in time, and for one week on trial, when, if he was not suited or he found her not suitable he would defray whatever expenses she incurred by her journey.

He said her duties were not arduous, but would require tact and patience. The young lady who would depend upon her services suffered from extreme depression at times. The remuneration for the four weeks would be at the rate of fifty

dollars a week—which he considered generous. At the end of that time he hoped his daughter would be sufficiently recovered to admit of him taking her on a long-planned trip to the Continent.

The letter was frank and straightforward, and Hildegarde liked it. It gave directions for her journey, then. The writer signed himself, sincerely, “Luke Brevoort.”

Highly elated, Hildegarde sat down, made a copy of the letter for her mother, and wrote then, long and affectionately. The money—which she, too, considered generous, would be a great help to them.

“He’ll pay for his brother’s burial, after all,” said Hildegarde, half-smiling. “That was almost a hundred dollars I had not dreamed of spending, and here is two hundred I never dreamed of earning. It pays to cast one’s bread on the waters.” Her face was flushed, her eyes triumphant. “Well, I didn’t do it expecting a return. I did as I would be done by—though,” she shuddered, “please God none of my dear ones will be driven to such extremity. Poor, poor old man! To live alone and untended when the ones who would have cared for you would have been only too glad to have been of

service! What a fate it is to be old and lonely."

The thought saddened her.

"God grant my mother dies while we who love her are able to take care of her," she went on. "I know there must be compensations for neglected old age—if not in this world, surely, surely in the next. But she has borne enough—"

She caught a reflection of herself in the mirror, and a smile covered her lips.

"I mustn't think of anything like this—only of her motto, 'God will provide.' He has provided so often for us all that I am ungrateful even to dream of a future in which He will not do so."

She resolved to start for Pine Bole Saturday—and then a sudden inspiration came. Why not finish up as far as possible that day and take a flying trip to Lady's Hall that very night? She would have to leave early the following afternoon in order to get her packing done, but she would have the satisfaction of seeing her mother.

With Hildegard to think was to act, and if any one had a record of the visits she made that day and the quantity of work she performed, it would seem hardly credible. Thursday night saw her tired but satisfied. Those of her pupils she could

reach had been called on and notified that their lessons were to cease for six weeks. She wrote to those with whom she was on more intimate terms. She had already sent a letter to Luke Brevoort informing him that she would start for Pine Bole Saturday.

The last train to stop at Cliffden left at ten o'clock Thursday night, and it was not until Hildgarde was really seated in it and it was moving out of the station that she realized how tired she was. However, fatigue was an after consideration when she remembered that each mile was lessening the distance between her and those who loved her. No, nor did she mind the long tramp through the country, sweet with the dews of summer, which she had to take in order to reach Lady's Hall.

And she was too happy when Florence and her mother, roused from slumber by her repeated knockings, greeted her, to dream that there was a limit to bodily endurance. Such questionings and such joy and such loving raptures! There was no sleep for any of the three that night. How they speculated on the future! Mrs. Craig, at first timorous, was won completely by Hildgarde's enthusiasm.

"For if," said the girl, "it amounts to nothing but just the money there is in it, it is worth trying."

"But if he discovers—" ventured Florence.

"What can he discover? That my name is Craig, not Gray—and I will explain that by telling the truth. If I signed myself Craig he would not have sent for me."

"That is true," said Mrs. Craig. "In one way I can't see any argument against the plan. If there were any danger, I would not approve of it. But as it is——"

"Well, it's settled," said Hildegarde decisively. "And now," turning to her sister, "who is Tom Phelps?"

Florence's delicate face grew rosy.

"What a question—and how you ask it!" she exclaimed. "He is Lucy's cousin, Hildegarde. We meet him occasionally on our walks to the Lady's Well, and—and he is very good to mother."

Hildegarde laughed.

"That sounds suggestive," she said. "Very good to mother! A beginning. Who is he, mother?"

"The son of one of the old residents, and quite a nice young man, so far as I can judge," said

Mrs. Craig. "It seems his father, out of pity for Mary Patterson, offered to marry her. She asked time to consider, and the old gentleman called it off at once. That woman told all through Cliffden that her savings went to support my father during the latter part of his life, but Mr. Dunley often drops in on us now—he has been here three or four times, and when he saw how badly I felt over the report, he informed me that she had been in the habit of receiving a money order from Luke Brevoort every month."

Hildegarde raised her eyebrows.

"From Uncle Luke?"

"Yes—he probably sent enough to provide for father. It was kind enough of him in one way, but oh! I wish he had told me the truth that day he met me five years ago. Five years, dear—think of it! We might have been all that time at Lady's Hall taking care of him."

"Mother," said Hildegarde, quickly, "it can't be helped now, and you mustn't fret over it. If Lady's Hall has such a bad influence on you, the best thing you can do is to come back to the city."

She did not mean this, but it had the required effect. At any rate, this unexpected visit cheered the mother considerably, and the three spent a

delightful day, Hildegarde taking a later train than she had intended. But she felt all the brighter and happier when she left them, and the prospects of her new venture helped to keep up their spirits. Being of a naturally strong constitution, Hildegarde did not feel the strain of her journey and lack of sleep as another might. She reached home about midnight Friday, and went to bed at once. The morning found her thoroughly refreshed. She rushed through her packing, sent a telegram to Mr. Luke Brevoort, and took the two o'clock train for Pine Bole.

From the reception of his letter on Thursday she had scarcely had time to breathe—everything had happened in such a hurry, and her every moment had been filled to the utmost. Now at last she could draw her breath, and find time to wonder over the people to whom she was going. But her journey was without incident. Again night fell before she arrived at her destination. She had had no idea of the length of time it would take, and as midnight approached she grew uneasy. Inquiring of the conductor she was told that the train would not arrive at the station until three in the morning.

After the first shock, she resolved to make the

best of it. She might have to sit in the station until daylight, she reflected, but that was surely not the worst that could happen—unless the station were closed. Even then, the summer nights were not unpleasant. She had never experienced the rigors of a summer night in the mountains of Vermont.

She was the only one to alight when the train slowed into the station, and her first sensation was that of chilliness, for the night was quite cold. However, she did not have to speculate on her next move, for a sleepy-looking servant loomed up out of the darkness, and inquired if she were "Miss Gray."

"I am," said Hildegarde. "You are from Pine Bole?"

"Yes," answered the man. "Mr. Brevoort sent the carriage after you."

With a feeling of gratitude Hildegarde got into the carriage, which was a closed one, the man put her bag on the seat opposite, and they set off. It seemed a long distance to Hildegarde. She could not see anything, for the night was dark, nor did she notice that they were approaching a house until the carriage stopped. Glancing out of the window, then, she saw lights.



and surmised that they had reached Pine Bole.

The housekeeper, a neat, gray-haired woman in black, greeted her.

"You will come and have some tea with me," she said, "and then I will show you your room. Mr. Brevoort will see you in the morning."

"I am so sorry," said Hildegarde. "I had no idea the train would arrive so late, or I would not have started."

"It was a lucky thing you sent the telegram," said the housekeeper, whose name, Hildegarde afterward discovered, was Mrs. Wheeler. "I don't know what in the world might have happened to you all alone in the wilderness at this hour of the night."

"I would have managed," said Hildegarde, smiling. "I am used to managing."

Mrs. Wheeler smiled, too, but in a disbelieving fashion, and led the way to her room, where the table was set, and a kettle of boiling water hissed on an alcohol stove, ready to be made into tea.

"Breakfast is at nine o'clock to-morrow morning," said Mrs. Wheeler. "You will meet Mr. Brevoort and Miss Irma at the breakfast table."

"To-morrow is Sunday," said Hildegarde. The

warmth of the room was grateful, as was the steaming tea which Mrs. Wheeler now handed to her. "I must go to church. Is there a Catholic church anywhere around here?"

"Catholic? Are you a Catholic?" asked Mrs. Wheeler. Her surprise was so evident that Hildegard had to remark it.

"I am a Catholic—and why?"

"It seems strange. Mr. Brevoort will not hire any Catholic servants—does not want any Catholics around him." Mrs. Wheeler looked at her kindly. "If I were you, I would not mention my religion. That is the trouble with Miss Irma—she has a religious craze."

"But I will not deny my religion," said Hildegard, quietly; "not for fifty Mr. Brevoorts. I am sorry he did not speak of religion when he wrote me. If he objects to it I can leave to-morrow."

Mrs. Wheeler shrugged her shoulders.

"In that, of course, you must please yourself. There is a Catholic mission about five miles farther out. I believe service starts there at eleven o'clock to-morrow. Next Sunday it will be at eight."

Very little conversation passed between them after that. Hildegard was shown to her room—

or rooms, rather, for there were two placed at her disposal, and went to bed. The next morning she was awake at seven, prepared for the ordeal of facing her employer. At eight o'clock he sent for her.

\* \* \* \* \*

He was alone when she entered an apartment which was evidently intended for use as a library. The bookcases were there, but only scantily filled. The man standing at the window turned at her knock and bade her "Come in" peremptorily.

"This is Miss Gray?" he asked, advancing, and placing a chair for her. Hildegard nodded.

"And you are Mr. Brevoort?"

"I am."

They studied each other frankly. He was a tall man, gaunt of frame, with a gray head, set on massive shoulders, and a pair of deep set, dark-gray eyes which seemed piercing now as they traveled over the newcomer. He was a man who gave the impression of strength—physical and mental—and of indomitable will power, this last, shown in the set of his square jaws, and the poise of his head. Hildegard recognized these traits, and the recognition inspired her with respect—she had great strength of will herself. Luke Brevoort

on his part, saw a self-possessed young woman, of striking appearance, dark-haired and dark-eyed and more than ordinarily beautiful. He saw a candid, frank face; a proud face, and clear, honest eyes. He liked her on the instant. He liked the way she looked at him; he liked her carriage, her deep voice, which sounded melodious, the quiet resolute manner in which she took the chair he placed for her, and, after that first interrogation, waited for him to speak.

"Well, are you satisfied?" he asked, a faint smile touching his lips as she gazed at him so scrutinizingly.

"With your appearance, yes," she answered frankly. "And you?"

"If you play as well as your appearance pleases me you are a genius," he said.

There was no suspicion of flattery in his tones, although her eyes searched his countenance sharply for either that or irony.

"Wait a moment," she said. "Unfortunately I learned last night that you have one great objection which can be applied to me. You did not speak of religion in your letter, Mr. Brevoort, and I am a Catholic."

"A Catholic!"

His face changed and hardened in an unaccountable manner; his whole demeanor stiffened.

"I am very sorry—had I known—" he hesitated.

Hildegarde rose to her feet.

"I also am very sorry that you did not know," she said, proudly. "Of course, since you object to my religion—"

"My dear young woman, sit down. Wait a moment. Let me think." He began to pace the floor hurriedly, his brows contracted. "I have no objection to the religion. If I practised any myself I would be a Catholic. All my family is Catholic."

Hildegarde waited in silence.

"My daughter Irma—I am going to trust you, you see, absolutely, Miss Gray, and before I go on, I ask you to hold my confidence sacred."

"I shall so consider it," said Hildegarde.

"My daughter Irma has what she terms a vocation. That is, she wishes to enter a convent." His lips compressed themselves in a thin line. "I, of course, refused my consent. I have other plans for her."

Hildegarde stared at him wonderingly.

"She shall never enter a convent with my con-

sent—and she refuses to leave without it. We have had several stormy scenes—the last occurring some six months ago—since which time she seems more amenable to my wishes. After a while, I dare say, she will recover from this foolish fancy. My desire is, that you, Miss Gray, try to wean her away from this notion. Come, now. You're a young girl—bright, intelligent, I take it, and in your profession must have seen a good bit of life." He smiled pleasantly. "The very one, I hope, to help me now."

"A good bit of life," repeated Hildegarde, in a slow voice. "Mr. Brevoort, I am sorry. I am afraid I can not stay here."

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"If your daughter's vocation is from God, I shall not make myself the devil's advocate," she said, quite coolly, resting her hand on the back of the chair beside which she was standing. She had not seated herself again as he had bidden her. "I can promise to avoid religious discussions with your daughter—in her present state they would probably be harmful. But to paint the false delights of a false and hollow world—oh, no! The 'bit of life' I have seen in my profession did not

appeal to me, thank God, because I was safeguarded by my religion."

Her deep voice was vibrant—in spite of himself it touched him and thrilled him. In spite of himself a warm glow of admiration surged through him for this brave girl who would not deny her faith or its tenets for aught he might have to offer. He stood looking at her beautiful face, at her resolute mouth, at the proud head. Then he held out his hand impulsively.

"I don't know why, but I like you," he said. "I can't help myself. Go your own way, if you like it. But you will make that promise not to discuss religion with Irma?"

"I make that promise—yes."

"Very well, then. Let us shake hands on it." She clasped hands with the man, whom, she felt, was her enemy.

"You will meet the girl at breakfast—it will be served in fifteen minutes. Our talk has been a long one."

"I must attend Mass," said Hildegarde, abruptly. "If you will allow one of your men to come with me and show me the way the first time I will not trouble you again. Mass is at eleven o'clock, I believe in the mission chapel."

"And you would walk that five miles?" quickly  
"It is five miles away, remember."

"I know it. I would prefer to walk twice that distance in order to assist at Sunday Mass. I am a good walker and enjoy nothing better. Your daughter does not go?"

"No—I forbade it—at least temporarily, until she gets over this freakish notion. But—" and he frowned, "I will not have you walk to Pine Grove—I shall send Richard out with the carriage through the rear entrance. You can go and come that way and Irma will never see you."

"I am afraid I am putting you to a lot of trouble," she said with a half-smile. "After all, I am only here on trial, you know."

"That is so," he answered, quickly, "I may not have to repeat this. You may not be found suitable after all."



## CHAPTER IX.

## IRMA BREVOORT.

A FEW minutes later Hildegarde followed Mr. Brevoort into a handsomely appointed morning-room. The table was set and three places arranged.

"Where is Miss Irma?" were Mr. Brevoort's first words. Mrs. Wheeler answered him in a somewhat flurried fashion, Hildegarde thought.

"She is lying down with one of her bad headaches. I brought some toast and tea to her room, and darkened it, as usual."

"How unfortunate!" said Mr. Brevoort. "Irma is subject to these attacks, Miss Gray. They occur about once a month. She will be down for luncheon, however—it never lasts after one o'clock. But that it should happen on your first day here!"

"I shall not have much leisure until noon myself," said Hildegarde, briefly. She noticed that

all Mr. Brevoort's servants spoke to him in a hurried, nervous fashion, as if afraid of him. "You have luncheon late, I hope?"

"Half-past one on Sundays."

"That is good. I will surely be back again by that time."

"Oh, yes—I had forgotten. Mrs. Wheeler, tell Richard to harness up. Miss Gray is going to Pine Grove to-day, to the Catholic chapel there."

Mrs. Wheeler stared at the man in consternation. He scowled.

"You heard me?"

"Oh, yes, sir." His sharp question seemed to upset her. "I shall tell Richard to be ready as soon as breakfast is over."

"Thank you," said Hildegarde, with a smile; inwardly a little curious to know why every one seemed so afraid of Luke Brevoort. She could see nothing to fear in him. He had a peremptory manner, true, but that was easily encountered. Breakfast passed pleasantly. The forbidden topic did not come up again, and as soon as the meal ended, Hildegarde, preceded by Mrs. Wheeler, made her way out of the rear entrance to where Richard waited with the horse.

Hildegarde had rarely enjoyed anything in her life so keenly as this drive through the beautiful wild country. At certain places, where the road was rough, she alighted from the small cart and walked behind it. When they got to Pine Grove, to the small wooden chapel erected there by the few pious Catholic residents, she had some moments left in which to look around her. There were horses tied to trees, rickety buckboards, vehicles of all descriptions. And the congregation was as varied as its method of transportation. Hildegarde dropped into her seat in the back of the church. The soft balminess of the mountain summer air, the delicious odor of the pines, the quiet and holy hour, stole upon her pulses with a new meaning. She felt, somehow, that she was nearer to God here, in this poor, bare chapel, than she had ever been in her life.

The priest, a tall rugged man, spare of frame and tanned of countenance, said Mass. When it was over Hildegarde sat back, and waited for the small congregation to file out, noisily, before continuing her prayers. More than one pair of eyes were fastened on her with curiosity, but her own were riveted on the altar from which the priest had not yet removed the Blessed Sacrament.

There had been only one or two people to receive communion at this late Mass—but among them Hildegarde had casually noticed a slender figure dressed in gray. She had only noticed this one in particular because she seemed foreign to her companions by reason of her bearing and attire. Now as Hildegarde raised her eyes she caught a glimpse of this girl coming down the aisle. She was quite close to her as she passed, and she was surprised at the beauty of the fair face. She had not long to observe it, for as she approached, the girl put up a gloved hand and drew down a heavy veil—so heavy as to be remarkable on such a warm day. She had seen Hildegarde's glance of surprise, and a faint color stole into her cheeks before the disguising veil was lowered.

A few minutes later Hildegarde went out and found the dogcart ready and Richard somewhat impatient to be gone. They had an uneventful drive home, an easier drive, for it was down grade almost all of the way. They reached Pine Bole at half-past twelve. When Hildegarde entered the hall she met Mrs. Wheeler.

"Miss Brevoort is better, I trust?" she said pleasantly.

"She will be down to lunch," said Mrs. Wheeler, somewhat evasively.

"That is good," returned Hildegarde.

There was no one to bother her. She washed her face and hands, donned a lighter waist, and then went downstairs again. She had caught a glimpse of the parlor that morning as she passed it to enter Mr. Brevoort's presence, and she surmised, rightly enough, that the music room, if there was one, must be somewhere near. She found it by lifting aside the portieres that divided the two rooms.

An exclamation of surprise fell from her lips as she entered. The apartment was lighted by a beautiful bay window, around which ran a low, comfortable seat, and through which could be seen the lovely pines, straight and tall, and the blue-topped mountains. The room was done in leather of some dark hue. Pictures of noted composers and busts of famous musicians formed part of the adornment, but the one article that riveted Hildegarde's attention was the magnificent grand piano in the center. She had never seen a handsomer instrument, and for the moment she had eyes for nothing else. She went to it at once, and raised the cover. It was placed to command that

glorious view of trees and mountains, and she noticed this, but only casually, as she seated herself, for, the moment that her fingers touched the keys she forgot all else.

Her own little cottage upright faded away into the realm of forgotten and despised things. She touched those keys, and seemed to touch a soul beneath them. She felt as if her own soul and the music she was capable of evoking now was in perfect harmony. She played with *abandon*, forgetful of everything but the desire to do justice to the noble instrument. Space, time, surroundings, were forgotten. She tried it in all phases. Sonata and symphony, scherzo and berceuse. The passionate thunder of Wagner, the dreaminess of Schumann, the delicate fantasy of Mozart—all were expressed as, she felt, she had never in her life been able to express them. When at last she ceased, and let her fingers drop upon the keys half idly, trickling out music, as it were, from tremolos and arpeggios, Mr. Brevoort advanced into the room.

"Miss Gray," he said, in his harsh, abrupt manner, "allow me to congratulate you. You have the soul of an artist."

She smiled.

"It is the piano," she said, "this beautiful piano."

"We have been listening, unable to stir, my daughter and I, for three-quarters of an hour," he went on. "You will appreciate that when I tell you that I hate to be kept waiting for my meals."

"It is lunch-time?" Hildegarde exclaimed, springing to her feet. "I am so sorry—I had forgotten."

"I can well believe it," he said. "So had we. It is now two o'clock."

Hildegarde was much shocked. She closed the piano hurriedly.

"I am so sorry," she repeated. "I had no idea—"

They were in the parlor. A slender figure stood watching them approach, her face turned expectantly toward them. As she saw Hildegarde she turned pale, so that she was almost deathly white when they reached her side.

"This is Miss Gray, Irma—and I am sure after listening to her you will need no further introduction. But what is the matter, girl? I don't believe you're well yet."

"I feel faint—it is nothing," said the girl. She gave Hildegarde a curious glance—half-defiant,

half-pleading. But Hildegarde's face was impassive.

"I am pleased, indeed," she said, holding firmly the hand that Irma Brevoort extended. "But much annoyed that my music should have been the means—"

"Oh, it was beautiful—I never heard anything like it," said the girl, fervently. "I shall almost be afraid to ask you to play for me—you play so wonderfully."

Luke Brevoort looked suddenly pleased. The color had come back to Irma's cheeks, her eyes were bright as stars. She seemed to glance at Hildegarde with interest in her face, and it delighted the man whose aim it was to keep her occupied now with worldly things.

After luncheon he left the two alone, to become acquainted, he said, and went out to the stables. Irma Brevoort led the way to the piazza. A silence had fallen between the two with Mr. Brevoort's departure, and now Irma was the first to break it.

"You recognized me?" she asked.

"Yes," said Hildegarde, briefly.

"I thought so. It is very hard," said the girl; "my father is a good man, but he can not see as



I do. He does not know that my religion is my whole existence."

Hildegarde was silent. Irma's eyes wandered out to the mountains, and to the tall green pines.

"He brings me here to bury me away from it." She laughed under her breath. "Well, many waters can not quench love."

And still Hildegarde was silent. Irma brought her eyes back from their distant contemplation.

"You do not care to speak on this subject, perhaps?" she ventured.

"Yes," said Hildegarde, "I do, but I can not find words. Tell me, do you do this often?"

"At every late Mass. I can not manage it with the early ones."

"And how do you reach Pine Grove?"

Irma laughed.

"I walk."

"Walk! You!"

"Yes, I. Walk there and back."

"And he has never discovered it?"

"Not yet. He will, in time, I daresay, but until he does I shall keep it up. After that I shall have to devise a new means. God will provide. Oh, when I saw you coming out of that music-room I wanted to run away and hide myself."

"You might have known I would not betray you—a Catholic like myself," said Hildegarde. She looked at her with keenest admiration. "You are a wonderful girl. And to think that I was driven to church by your father's orders, while his daughter walked that long distance, and walked back! Ten miles! You must be worn out."

"I am tired," said Irma, "but I dare not say so. When I recover from my 'headaches,'" meaningly, "I always feel good—and to-night's rest will make up for it, though my limbs will be a little stiff to-morrow."

"I cannot seem to grasp it even yet," declared Hildegarde. "But surely we can manage things differently now. Mrs. Wheeler knows?"

"I think she suspects, though I have never told her. She has been with us a good many years—and only for her I would never be able to get away."

Neither of the girls seemed to realize that they were talking as if they had known each other all their lives. The peculiar circumstances of their meeting, their knowledge of mutual faith, the warm admiration which Hildegarde instantly conceived for the girl, tender and delicately nurtured, wh-

would make such sacrifices to assist at Holy Mass, the feeling of relief and joy which that girl, hitherto compelled to keep to herself thoughts on this subject so dear to her, made them immediate friends.

"Your father was much put out when he discovered my religion," said Hildegarde, "and I offered to leave at once. He allows me to remain on condition that I do not permit any religious discussions. He told me that you felt you had a vocation. I, of course, will do as he bids me, since I am in his employ. But tell me this—will your father change? Don't you think that he will reconsider?"

Irma turned her head away and was silent. When she looked at Hildegarde again her eyes were filled with tears.

"No," she said; "I do not think my father will change his mind. He is a good man in many ways but in others—" She shrugged her shoulders. "He admires you, Miss Gray. Every one else is afraid of him, but you seem to take him as a matter of course, and the difference has made him more polite to you than I have ever seen him to any one. I am very much afraid of him myself," she went on; "the only time in

my life I went contrary to his wishes was in regard to—”

She blushed and broke off. Then she put her hand on Hildegarde's arm, hurriedly.

“Listen,” she said, “I must trust you. Father wants me to marry a man named Stephen Bayliss—he told me so. This man—who is, I presume, young and handsome, and above all, wealthy, is coming here to visit us. He is in absolute ignorance of my father's designs. The day he told me what he wished I told him of my plans for the future. Miss Gray, I had never seen my father angry before. I never want to see him angry again. He had always been queer with me about religion, but now he turned against it absolutely—insulted my good friend, Father Danton, even forbade him the house. He has kept this up a year, and is trying to tire me out.”

Hildegarde patted her hand sympathetically.

“It will pass,” she said; “it is a trial.”

“Sometimes a bitter one,” said Irma, “but the end is worth it. I shall surely know the Lord wants me if I am able to persevere.”

“Doesn't he grow tired waiting for you to give in?”

Irma shook her head.

"You do not know my father," she said, gravely; "unless God takes a hand in this—and I know that He will—I will live to be a gray-headed old woman here at Pine Bole. You do not know my father," she repeated, and her smile was a sad one.

"When do you expect this Mr. Bayliss?"

"Any time now—the invitation has been standing for some months, and I suppose, as he is a business man, he will come during the next few weeks, that being a dull time in the city, they say. I dread his coming."

"It will make it harder for you?"

"That I do not know," said Irma. "At any rate, he's a Catholic. Perhaps he may be a man—well, who will not care for me. Perhaps—" and she smiled a little. "No, I will not say that—you might grow angry."

"I don't think I would grow angry," said Hildgarde. "It seems ridiculous to invite a man to your home for the express purpose of having him fall in love with your daughter."

"He is rich," said Irma; "you will find out that my father loves money—even more than his daughter. Don't think that I am speaking with undue harshness now," hastily. "He has been a

good father—he has provided for my education, he dresses me well, he wants me to be a credit to him at all times. He is glad when people like me and praise me, and at home in the city I tried to attract people because it *does* please him so much. He is satisfied with the good looks the Lord gave me, and the accomplishments for the acquirement of which he has spent his money. He wants me to shine, to be brilliant, to converse wittily, to laugh, to dance, to sing, to hunt, to skate, to ride. He wants, above all, that people will say ‘What a beautiful daughter Luke Brevoort has’— not ‘What a beautiful girl Irma Brevoort is.’ He would let my soul starve. He did, until it grew sick for its natural food. I found the rest and the ease that I had never known in the Catholic Church. I became friends with my soul, in fact, and he would want me to ignore it.”

Hildegarde stared at her. Stared at the lovely fair face, at the beautiful eyes, blue as pansies, and shining like stars, at the golden hair clustering above blue-veined temples, at the softly-curved lips, red as cherries. Who ever could imagine such thoughts as these behind such an exterior? She was fitted for all the follies that made the life of a wealthy girl a round of delight; her brilliant

beauty would be the toast of any circle. But the deep thoughtfulness which this speech betrayed showed her to be no nonentity. Visions of the life she longed for rose before Hildegarde's mental sight. A religious, a nun—giving this brilliant beauty, this thoughtfulness, these talents, to the service of her Saviour. Inwardly Hildegarde rejoiced and was glad. It was like a draught of water in the desert, a ray of sunlight to one weary of darkness. She felt spiritually refreshed.

"I hope God will grant you your wish," she said, much moved; "I have said I would not discuss religion, and I am afraid that even in listening to you I am straining that promise a little. But believe one thing—I may not say much to you—I am only a stranger, I have come into your life and will pass out of it in a little while—but you will have my prayers, humble and unworthy as they may be, and at every Mass I hear I shall make a memento for your intention until it is granted. I will ask my mother and sister to do so, as well, when I write to them."

Irma Brevoort looked up at her with those blue and brilliant eyes.

"It is the first consolation I have known in a long while—your coming," she said. "It is the

turning of the tide for me—of that I am positive. Something will happen to show my father his folly.”

“Something must happen,” said Hildegard, with sudden energy. She thought of her own recent fears, her own past doubts, her own secret misgivings. Before the obstacles which this girl willingly encountered and overcame, her difficulties seemed dwarfed and small.

She was glad that she had come to Pine Bole. Old Luke Brevoort would repay study, she felt. She had liked him, his face giving no indication of the character which Irma presented for her contemplation.

“I am surprised that Mr. Brevoort allowed me to stay,” she continued. “If he knew your state of mind he would not permit it, I am sure. He would be afraid of my influence.”

Irma nodded.

“As it is,” she said, “you may be blamed in the end. He may lay my obduracy, as he calls it, directly at your door.”

“Has he given you any length of time to decide?”

“Until the first of October. At that time we mean to leave for the Continent. He hopes to make it a wedding-trip, as well.”



"But, my dear girl," cried Hildegarde, aghast, "you mean to say that without any knowledge of this young man's sentiments—"

"Oh, no—my father is well acquainted with him. Mr. Bayliss is a senior partner in the firm of which my father is a silent member. He knows he is not married, has no attachments, and that he admires the photograph of the beautiful Miss Brevoort very much."

She laughed aloud—so sweetly and light-heartedly that Hildegarde smiled in sympathy. And it was this bright laugh that Luke Brevoort heard as he stepped from the room out on to the piazza. An expression of gratification crossed his severe countenance.

"My daughter has not laughed like that in months," he said. "Of whom or what are you talking to create such a good effect, Miss Gray?"

"The beautiful Miss Brevoort," said Hildegarde.

Luke Brevoort looked at her keenly, critically.

"Do you think she deserves the title?" he asked.

"I have never seen any one I admired so much," said Hildegarde, with frankness, and Irma blushed and glanced at her reproachfully.

"That is hardly fair on such short acquaintance," she said.

"I am not given to idle compliments, even on short acquaintance," said Hildegarde.

## CHAPTER X.

## "THE BEST LAID PLANS OF MICE AND MEN—"

THAT first week at Pine Bole was an interesting one to Hildegarde, though nothing occurred to vary the monotony. With her music, however, she never could be lonely, while Irma Brevoort and she became inseparable. They walked and rode and read and studied together. More and more, as Irma's generous character unfolded before her eyes, did Hildegarde grow to esteem her, and in the end to care for her. More and more, as she voluntarily came in contact with Luke Brevoort, seeking his company indeed for the purpose of becoming acquainted with him, did she marvel at the strange contradictions of his nature.

He was open-handed only in matters that concerned his daughter. Where she was to be considered the purse-strings were loosened. Everywhere else, however, she found evidence of a strange penuriousness. Not one among his servants had a particle of attachment for him, and

no matter how good or faithful the man or woman in his employ might be, the slightest assertion of independence brought immediate dismissal. Hildegarde wondered how he managed to retain servants so far from any city—she had often heard that no domestic cared to live very far away from the pleasures that city life affords. But she found out that almost all those in the house were middle-aged, or at least settled in life—he wanted no young people about him. They were unmarried or death had deprived them of wife or husband as the case might be. To these people Luke Brevoort paid wages above the average, insisting then on punctuality and on strict economy, the details of which were his own especial care.

Hildegarde longed often to be able to enter into his mind, and to read its curious intricacies. With her he was genial, pleasant, ready of praise; but she saw his harshness with others, and it repelled her. She knew that if she were in Irma's position she would dread that day in which she would have to face his anger and tell him of her decision.

"Mr. Bayliss will be here Saturday—to-morrow morning," he announced toward the end of the week, entering the music-room in which both girls

were seated, an open letter in his hand. "He does not tell me when he has to return—" he glanced through the note hastily. "Now, Miss Gray— Oh, by the way, this is Friday; I did not notice any letters among my mail any day this week for you."

"No?" said Hildegarde, smiling. "Then my friends must be neglecting me." She did not say that she called at the country post-office every morning for her own mail, and had asked the pleasant country-woman in charge never to send anything for her to the Brevoort mansion.

"You are surely too young and pretty to have to suffer such neglect long," said Luke Brevoort.

Hildegarde looked at him steadily.

"I am not neglected," she said.

"What is it then—natural antipathy?"

"I don't know," said Hildegarde, shrugging her shoulders. "Men, young or old, have no attraction for me, if that is what you mean—I am wedded to my music."

"I was speaking of Mr. Bayliss, I believe," said Luke Brevoort; "you may not understand, Miss Gray, that I am very anxious that he and Irma should marry. He is an estimable character—"

"Father," said Irma, in a protesting tone, "Miss Gray will not know what you are talking about."

"I'll wager Miss Gray will," said Luke Brevoort quickly. "In other words, I want him and Irma to be left alone as much as possible. I may as well tell you that the matter is as good as arranged. Mr. Bayliss admires Irma so intensely that it will only be a matter of a few days after his arrival here—"

"Please, father," said Irma, her face a deep-red, "do not talk in that fashion to Miss Gray."

But Hildegard knew that Luke Brevoort had an object—that he wanted to warn her that the visitor was already appropriated. She could not hide the scorn of the smile that leaped to her flexible mouth.

"Would you like my services to terminate tomorrow?" she asked. "Perhaps Miss Brevoort will not find me necessary after—"

A dismayed exclamation burst from Irma's lips, but the man's gray eyes twinkled. In his own unaccountable and autocratic fashion he had begun to like Miss Gray, and her independence appealed to him. Besides that, he knew she understood.

"We can not let you go yet," he said, affecting not to notice her attitude. "Irma, I daresay, will find you as necessary as ever. Be careful," he laughed, as he turned to leave the room; "we may discover that you are indispensable, and persuade you to take an ocean voyage with us."

Hildegarde sat as he had left her, feeling vaguely uncomfortable. Was it mere fancy on her part, or was there a peculiar expression on Luke Brevoort's face when he addressed her? Could it be that he suspected her? Irma ran her fingers idly up and down the keys and then turned around on the stool.

"The tug of war begins to-morrow," she said.

"Poor child," said Hildegarde. "What will you do if he falls in love with you in earnest?"

"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

"You mean?"

"I mean that you and I must judge whether or not this Stephen Bayliss is a man to be trusted. If he is I am going to trust him."

"To tell him—"

"My intentions, my father's wish 'o thwart them."

"You are a brave girl," said Hildegarde, slowly.

"But, oh, for your own sake, how much I wish it were over."

"My father said he would kill me rather than let me enter religion," said the beautiful girl, thoughtfully. "I believe he made many sacrifices to acquire his wealth—he told me as much. 'Do you think I have done all the things which I found I had to do, to leave my money to you in your convent, or to a pack of beggarly cousins?' he asked me. He was furious."

"Oh—you have relatives?" queried Hildegarde.

"I wish I knew," said Irma. "I believe there is an old man living somewhere in the country, who is a relative, because father used to send him money. And at another time I overheard a name—Florence Craig, I think. But of that I can not be certain."

"No, of course—not since he does not seem to want to tell you more. You can't afford to annoy him."

"Can't? But I do annoy him exceedingly. There is one consolation—it will, it must end; all things have an ending."

The rest of the day passed as uneventfully as the ones that had preceded it. Hildegarde was



surprised to find that she looked forward with dread to the coming of this unknown Stephen Bayliss. She was not afraid for herself, but for Irma. In those five days she had begun to realize the rock of obstinacy which this girl was deliberately trying to conquer. She found herself acknowledging that she would not like to oppose Luke Brevoort, even though she felt that if she were Irma and had Irma's motives, she could do nothing else. Still, beautiful as the girl was, and brilliant, too, at times, yielding of manner and gentle of speech, Hildegard felt that underneath she had a vein of her father's doggedness. Her spirit was in arms against his earthly will.

"Will you ride with me to the station to meet Mr. Bayliss, Irma?" he asked her the next morning.

"With pleasure," answered the girl, brightly. She made no offer to include Hildegard, nor did Luke Brevoort seem to desire Hildegard's presence. When Irma left the room to get her hat the man turned to his daughter's companion.

"I have never seen Irma so cheerful as since your arrival here—you have worked wonders," he said. "She used to mope by herself, or sit for hours staring out of the window."

"She strikes me as being a particularly active and happy-natured girl," said Hildegarde. "I have not observed the slightest trace of melancholy in her disposition. You say she becomes melancholy?"

"She has had despondent moods, yes—as I tell you, sitting for a day at a time, refusing to eat or speak."

Hildegarde raised her eyebrows.

"Your policy of weaning her away from the world is a poor one," she said; "a girl like Irma needs companionship, she needs youth. I do not think you will accomplish your purpose at Pine Bole."

Luke Brevoort stared straight before him.

"She can have anything she desires if she will but say the word," he returned grimly; "she can have pleasure and gayety and excitement to-morrow."

"On your terms," said Hildegarde.

The bold directness of this young girl was alluring. Luke Brevoort did not need the tone of her voice now to tell him of her disapproval.

"Has Irma confided in you?" he asked, almost eagerly.

"To a certain extent," was the slow and guarded reply.

"I have," he said. "I have told you what I want for Irma. She has everything to make life desirable, pleasant, beautiful. She must marry—marry well, and bring up children, to inherit the wealth that will be hers. Come now, Miss Gray—you have seen a good deal of the girl. Will she do as I require?"

Hildegarde raised her dark eyes and met his squarely.

"Why do you repose such confidence in me—a stranger?" she said. "What do you know of me—either of you? I may be different to what I seem—I may have come here to help Irma. How do you know," scornfully, for his conversation and warning of the day before rankled still, "that I am not secretly encouraging your daughter in her ideas?"

Luke Brevoort laughed.

"No," he said, "not with your face and eyes, and your painful aptness for truth-telling. There is nothing of the flatterer about you, Miss Gray. I do not trust many people—I am too good a character-reader for that. But I trust you. And

I wait for an answer to my question. Will my daughter obey me?"

"And if Miss Brevoort asked me 'Will my father yield to me?' I could only say to her what I must say to you: 'God alone knows the heart.' "

"You are no flatterer, perhaps, but a bit diplomatic," he answered. He was plainly vexed.

"You are a self-willed man," returned Hildgarde, "and your daughter has inherited your character."

She watched them drive away together in the carriage—the girl so radiant and smiling, the father laughing as he conversed with her. And she thought how little he understood his own child.

"It will be a fearful awakening," she said. " 'She must marry well and bring up children to inherit the wealth that will be hers.' Honestly hers, Luke Brevoort? I wonder if I asked you that question would you be able to answer me—and how would you answer me? Or if I brought to you that precious green vase what would you say to me? Or if you knew that 'Miss Gray' is your dead brother's grandchild—what would you say to me then, Mr. Brevoort?"

She rocked herself idly. She had been trying to read, but now the book had lost all charm for her.

"I feel strange," she said; "nervous, restless, almost unhappy. And why? My mother is content, Florence gaining strength every day, waking up to new interest in life. Unless I mistake the signs, the springtime of youth has come for my delicate little sister, and she will grow well and happy. I think she loves this Tom Phelps, and he loves her. Why should this strange unrest overpower me? Why am I upset and anxious? Have I really taken Irma Brevoort's hopes and longings so closely to myself that they annoy me?"

She found no answer to any of these questions, and, as was usual to her, went off to the great piano she had learned to love, to forget everything that might distress her in the happiness that music meant.

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Meanwhile, just a few moments before Luke Brevoort and his daughter arrived at the station, the train had deposited those travelers whose journey terminated at Pine Bole. And when the two or three others had departed on their several ways, the one young man among them still stood with his bags at his feet, trying to decide whether

to inquire the way to the Brevoort place, or to wait the possible arrival of a conveyance.

It was Stephen Bayliss himself—young, but not remarkably so. Rather, young-old, with a resolute countenance which would, perhaps, entitle him to the appellation handsome. But it was a weak adjective applied to him. His face was more than handsome. It was clever, earnest, with that expression of alertness and self-confidence which has come to be known as the American expression. He was a big man in every way and well-made physically, his height offset by his broad shoulders and massive limbs.

The quietness of the summer morning pleased him mightily, coming as he did from the bustle of the city. He stood his suit-case on end, and sitting down on it, proceeded to light a cigarette, while he took his bearings, so to speak. And it was thus that Irma Brevoort saw him first—calmly seated, enjoying a smoke, with a pleased look on his face.

"I was giving myself time to make up my mind," he said, in answer to Luke Brevoort's laughing greeting and inquiries. "You know my motto, 'When in doubt, smoke.'"

Both laughed then, and a smile curved Irma's

mouth. In response to her father's introduction, she held out her slim gloved hand, and bade him welcome prettily, Luke Brevoort noticing with much inward satisfaction the keen admiration on the young man's face. And at that moment Irma Brevoort was indeed strikingly lovely. The wind had brought color to her cheeks, and brightness to her eyes, and roughened the golden hair into stray tendrils about her delicate, picture-like face. Stephen Bayliss had heard much of the beauty of Luke Brevoort's daughter, but he stood amazed before this revelation of it. He had never imagined her anything so positively perfect.

He sat beside her during that long drive home, and she pointed out the different scenes of interest, and chatted with him merrily, and all the time Luke Brevoort's face grew smooth and lost its severe lines, and there was triumph in his eyes. He was exultant. If ever a man's features indicated his inward feelings Stephen Bayliss's did at that moment.

"I hope you like quietness," said Luke Brevoort as they neared the house. "I'm a pretty good hand at euchre and there's a billiard table. Also, there is some good fishing about a mile and a half farther up, but no shooting yet. Then Irma's

companion, Miss Gray, is a splendid musician. We find enough to occupy and amuse us——"

"And I am sure I will," said Stephen Bayliss, eagerly. "I have a craze which I foresee will be gratified—in fact, I have to confess to being a camera fiend."

Irma laughed delightedly.

"Splendid!" she said. "I am also given to the same pursuit. I can introduce you to all the prettiest spots, and we'll practice on Miss Gray. I have found her a very patient subject."

They were in the hall by this time. The young man's remark and Irma's reply put Luke Brevoort in a fine humor.

"Miss Gray!" said Stephen Bayliss. "Yes, let me practice on Miss Gray, if she will allow it, and bring the result of my practice to bear on you."

Irma laughed.

"You do not know Miss Gray," she said; "listen—if you want an introduction to her come inside. Come easily, or she will hear us."

He followed her. There was a mischievous expression on her fair face, and he took the seat she pointed out to him. Hildegard was playing, and as he listened a look of wonder stole across his face. Perhaps the influences at work around her



had affected her mood, but just as they entered she touched the opening bars of Mozart's "Gloria." He sat back as the triumphant music smote upon his senses. No one could mistake the feeling that inspired her fingers. A selection from Rossini's "Stabat Mater" followed, and then the plaintive sweetness of the "Requiem." When he looked at Irma again he noticed that the bright alertness had left her face—she was no longer gay or mischievous. He had no clue to the light on her countenance, but it struck him, suddenly, that the beauty of this girl was not of earth, but of heaven. He had admired her as he admired all lovely things. But now the soul had risen to the surface, and to that strong admiration of his there seemed to come a quick reverence, that hallowed it. He did not realize this, then—not till afterward. But he understood that Irma Brevoort was not the society belle her father had pictured her.

"She will not play again—not after that," she said now. "Father, you take Mr. Bayliss to his room yourself, while I go to my Miss Gray. Luncheon will be ready in a half-hour—and we do not stand on ceremony for meals. Except that my father likes us to be punctual."

She adopted the manner of which she knew her father approved—half-playful, wholly self-possessed. But there was a certain gravity about her which had not been noticeable before. The two men left the room. Irma went to Hildegarde.

"We have been listening to you," she said, briefly. "Mr. Bayliss has come."

Hildegarde had been sitting with her elbow resting on the music rack, her head upon her palm. She looked up.

"Well, my dear?"

"He is a good man," said Irma.

Hildegarde smiled.

"A good man. That means that you can trust him?"

With a spontaneous gesture, Irma knelt on the floor by Hildegarde's side, and put her arms about her waist. Her blue eyes were moist.

"Why do I trust you?" she said. "I have nothing to go on save an instinct—but that instinct tells me that you are my friend. Miss Gray, help me now. Lend me your aid in this. Listen to me. I want Stephen Bayliss to like you."

Again Hildegarde smiled.

"My dear girl, can liking be commanded? And it would not be fair. You must be just to him, Irma."

"Even if he only pretends—until this is over," urged the girl. "Can't you feel that this is the crisis now? I am at the turning-point. Before you came I had no peace, no happiness—thinking only 'How long, O Lord, how long?' How long until I can go to where my heart is—how long until I can find the peace I crave? And when I thought of the uselessness of my life here, it would madden me. So from that sharp pain would come the dull one, and the hours of melancholy of which my father speaks. But now you are here—with your calm face and your calm eyes, and the end is coming. If I am not God's, soon, soon, and through you, then are my hopes in vain."

"Oh, my poor child," said Hildegarde, much moved, "would that I could help you!" She put her arms about her gently. "We must consider others, too. What I can do, I will do. As soon as it is possible you must tell Mr. Bayliss your intention. No man, if he is a true man, will betray you. Only do not count so much on me."

"I must," said Irma, "I must. You came to give me hope when I was almost desperate. O God, send it soon!"

She dropped her face on Hildegarde's knee, and

Hildegarde felt the sobs that shook her. Hope deferred maketh the heart sick. Truly did Hildegarde realize what an effort this girl made to be happy and bright and unconcerned when her heart was sick with yearning. And a passion of resentment rose in her toward Luke Brevoort, that he should thus, in his petty human way, try to thwart the purposes of God.

## CHAPTER XI.

## LUKE BREVOORT'S MISTAKE.

AT luncheon Mr. Bayliss met Miss Gray. Irma, by that time, had recovered her composure, and as Luke Brevoort was in the best of humors, the meal was a brilliant one. After it, the host took his guest away with him. He was not quite pleased with the first question that Bayliss asked—with, Brevoort thought, far too much eagerness.

"Who is Miss Gray—a relative?"

"No," said Luke Brevoort, hastily; "she is no relative. She is my daughter's companion."

"A very interesting girl," said the young man, briefly. "They make quite a contrast—she and Miss Irma."

Luke Brevoort smiled in a sour fashion.

"I can not believe there is any comparison," he said.

"Comparison? I did not compare them. They contrast well. Miss Irma is so blond, Miss Gray is so dark."

That was all. Stephen Bayliss could read Luke Brevoort's face, and he knew that this conversation was displeasing. Being a keen student of character, he had been able to see beneath the surface. He realized that all was not well with Luke Brevoort and his daughter, and he wondered, with a curiosity foreign to his nature, what the cause of disagreement could be. And Luke Brevoort in turn, was too wise not to let matters take their course from the beginning. In his peculiar, crusty fashion, he liked Miss Gray, but that any one could prefer her to his beautiful daughter would seem preposterous. In fact, that idea never came to him.

He was most attentive to Stephen Bayliss. He had a good deal of respect for the young man's business abilities. He knew he was the possessor of considerable wealth, and on the road to acquiring much more, and he felt that Irma would be more than unreasonable to allow such a chance to escape her. Surely Stephen Bayliss was handsome enough and manly enough to please even so fastidious a young woman?

It bid fair to be a pleasant house party. The guest lent himself willingly to their efforts to entertain him. Irma Brevoort was so charming,

Miss Gray so bright in spite of her reserved, almost cold manner. To him there seemed a hint of fearlessness about her which was even more attractive than Irma's brilliancy. The beautiful Miss Brevoort seemed continually making an effort, continually spurring herself to gayety. Miss Gray made no such pretensions, and yet, when he chanced to address himself to her, her remarks were so well-considered that he felt the greatest desire to become better acquainted with her.

It was now the custom with the Brevoorts to spend the evenings in the music-room, where Irma and Hildegard talked and played and sometimes sang together. Luke Brevoort did not see any reason for deviating from this rule now, and thither the four went when dinner was over. A delightful hour followed, and when Hildegard finally rose from the piano she would have been not a little startled, and even annoyed, had she known how deeply Stephen Bayliss was becoming engrossed in her. Luke Brevoort was not slow to notice the keen admiration which lingered on the young man's face as his eyes followed the slender, dark-robed figure moving across the room. He cast about in his mind for some topic of conversation that would distract him.

"By the way," he said, gruffly, "you heard no more of the Patterson woman after she called at the office that time?"

"The Patterson woman? You mean the woman with the green vase?" asked Bayliss. Luckily, Hildegard's back was turned toward them, for both question and reply startled her exceedingly. "I say, do you know, I didn't like that woman? She seemed entirely too shrewd for me. I imagine she knows more about the subject than she chooses to impart—"

"You mean—" began Luke Brevoort.

"That she knows you set a certain value on the vase—it being as you have told me, an heirloom—and that she is holding off for a big price."

"Humph!" growled Luke Brevoort, "I, too, know the Patterson woman, and there is every reason for her to be true to my interests. If she had that green vase she'd deliver it into my hands. No, sir. That beggarly crew at the Hall have it, and before I go away this year, I'll dispossess them, bag and baggage, the gang of thieving upstarts!"

Stephen Bayliss shrugged his shoulders.

"Come now, come now, Mr. Brevoort," he said, "I wouldn't be so harsh. In my opinion the



woman herself—Mrs. Craig is her name, is it not? —is perfectly honest—”

“Oh, ay—but she has a daughter, according to Mary Patterson, who would skin a flea for its hide. She’s got the green vase, I’ll be bound, and if she has—well, they can stay at Lady’s Hall until they rot there—worm-eaten old hole that it is—but only if she gives up my property. If not, I’ll teach them a trick or two when I get back to New York.”

He was irritated by Stephen Bayliss’ unmistakable attraction toward Hildegarde, and he seized upon any subject that would permit him to vent it. The young man looked at him warningly.

“This can not be of interest to Miss Irma or Miss Gray,” he said. “It is hardly polite to drag business into a social evening. The Patterson woman informed me that she meant to have a private interview with you, and that is all I know of the matter. Now, Miss Irma, if you will—”

A low tapping at the door interrupted him. At Luke Brevoort’s command, Mrs. Wheeler entered.

“There is a person here who wishes to see

you immediately, Mr. Brevoort," she said. "I have put her in the library."

"A person? Who is she?"

"Her name is Patterson, I believe, sir."

"Patterson!" said Bayliss. "Well, that's a coincidence. Better see her, Mr. Brevoort," he continued, laughing. "I'll bet you anything you like she's come to get your bid for the article of which we were just speaking."

It would not be well for the same Patterson woman if she had, he thought, as he saw the set of Luke Brevoort's jaw and the glint in his eyes as he went out of the room. Irma Brevoort, silent and preoccupied, sat in an armchair by the window. Miss Gray was seated opposite her, and Stephen Bayliss, glancing at her first, imagined that she seemed very pale—that there was something unnatural about her.

"I hope we did not annoy you," began the young man. "Young ladies are not generally interested in business—"

"Unless they are business young ladies," said Hildegard, rising. "May I beg to be excused for a few seconds—I wish to go to my room."

Irma's hands began to tremble—she felt, sud-

denly, that Hildegarde was giving her this chance to talk to Stephen Bayliss alone, and her face became almost ghastly. In spite of himself, Bayliss noticed the strangeness of their manner. Hildegarde seemed perturbed, while—was it fancy, or did Irma Brevoort fasten her beautiful eyes upon him half-imploringly before she lowered them?

A silence fell between the two when Hildegarde left them to themselves. With an effort at composure Irma folded her hands tightly, and resting her lovely head against the back of the chair turned to him with a question on her lips that he had to strain his ears to catch.

"Don't you think it peculiar, Mr. Bayliss, that my father chooses this vale of solitude, if I may so call it, in which to spend the summer months?"

"Why, no," said Stephen Bayliss. He looked at her fixedly. "Don't you prefer it, Miss Irma?"

She waited a moment before replying.

"I do not know," she said, frankly. "The place is immaterial to me. It is of little moment where I spend the time of my probation."

Much puzzled he gazed at her. Her eyes, bent upon her clasped fingers, were raised now to his face.

"May I ask you to give me your word that you will not repeat this conversation to my father?" she said, simply. "Do not be afraid—it is nothing that will injure your sense of honor. But you can be of great assistance to me, if you will only listen."

"My dear Miss Irma!" exclaimed the young man, "you surprise me. I of assistance to you—I cannot understand—"

"I know you can not. You will if you care to listen. Mr. Bayliss, my father has invited you here to fall in love with me and to ask for my hand in marriage. I am not supposed to have any voice in the matter. My father, once he feels that you are inclined to favor his desires, will try by every means in his power to coerce me."

The young man straightened up and his eyes kindled.

"But such a thing—who ever heard of such a thing! Are you sure, Miss Irma, that you do not misunderstand—"

She shook her head.

"No," she said, "I do not misunderstand. Mr. Bayliss, I may as well be frank with you at the beginning—it may be, too, the only chance I shall

have to talk to you, and I must hurry before my father comes back. The fact is, that for the past two years, I have seriously been considering entering a religious order. It is my belief, and the belief of my spiritual adviser, that I have a vocation for that life. I am my father's only child, and he is not religiously inclined. He laughed at my idea at first—would not entertain it. After a while he tried to talk me out of it. Then he argued and quarreled. Now I am condemned to solitude—have been kept here most of this year—bidden all the comforts of religion save those I obtain by stealth and trickery. My release from this is offered me when I promise to marry you. But I am already promised to God, not man."

Her low voice, vibrant with feeling, touched Stephen Bayliss as nothing in his life had ever touched him. He stared at the girl, understanding her strength of will, her nobility of soul, and his true Catholic manliness exulted in the self-knowledge that looked out of her eyes, radiated from her transformed features. He sprang to his feet, and crossing the room, dropped to one knee beside her chair, and seizing her hand in his, carried it to his lips.

"Oh," he said, "how can I thank you for this confidence—this unexpected trust; I might have known what it was that made you lovely—not perfection of feature, indeed, but beauty of soul. I shall never forget what you have said to me—"

"Mr. Bayliss, may I— Oh, I see! I beg your pardon!"

It was Luke Brevoort's voice behind him. The young man rose in embarrassment. In spite of a certain hardness, which had not been observable when he left the room to see his unexpected visitor, a grim smile of satisfaction hovered about his lips. Stephen Bayliss, in the light of Irma's revelation, read that smile and it angered him.

"You wanted me?" he asked.

"Not particularly," was the response. "I see that you are better engaged—do not allow me to interrupt you."

"You do not, I assure you."

He spoke stiffly, but Luke Brevoort attributed his manner to a young man's natural confusion at being discovered worshiping at the shrine of the girl he loves. It pleased him so well that it removed half of the unpleasantness which he had felt on entering.

"I wanted to tell you about that Patterson woman, who is actually here. I have ordered Mrs Wheeler to prepare a bed for her. She will stay at Pine Bole for a few days. But I will have lots of time to talk that over with you to-morrow. I will take myself off now."

He smiled once more in an understanding fashion. When he had left, Stephen and Irma stared at each other.

"He thinks the very worst," said Irma. "He thinks you were making love to me."

"And you are afraid?" He read the signs of fear in her white face and trembling hands.

"No—I can't say I'm afraid. Only I'm nervous. Some terrible shadow is hanging over me—some great danger."

"You poor child," he said, as Hildegarde had said it; "you poor little girl! He must be mad." And then: "Does Miss Gray know this?"

"Yes," said Irma. "Miss Gray was sent to me by God, I firmly believe, when my troubles were heaviest. I am acquainted with her less than three weeks, but I can truthfully say I never had a friend until she came. She is so helpful and so earnest—I can not tell what an inspiration she is. Only," a little wistfully, "I fear that my

father will blame her with myself when the clash comes."

"How can you live in anticipation of it?" asked Stephen Bayliss. "Why not have it over?"

"I must wait my father's time—which will come when your visit ceases."

A troubled look stole into the young man's eyes.

"I will go to-morrow, if you like," he said gravely. "But—will you pardon me, Miss Irma? I feel that I should like to know Miss Gray better. I am more deeply interested in her than in any girl I have ever met."

Irma laughed with the delight of a child.

"So soon? How splendid!" she said. "Oh, I am so pleased. You see, Mr. Bayliss, although I did not know you, I could not help allowing my mind to dwell on such a solution to what seemed my approaching trial. I appreciated Miss Gray so highly myself that I could not help hoping that you, too, would appreciate her. I think she is the sort of a girl to attract any man—"

She broke off in confusion, for a humorous smile curved his lips.

"I may not be the sort of a man to attract so talented a young woman," he said.



"I—I did not think of that," said Irma.  
"But—but don't you think you could try?"

And this time he did not smile or jest, but, bending, took her hand in his again, and held it firmly.

"I will try," he said; "and you will help me, surely?"

"If I only can," said Irma, fervently. "I will do all in my power."

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE SECRET OF THE GREEN VASE.

MEANWHILE Hildegarde had gone to her own room in a perturbed state of mind indeed. Mary Patterson at Pine Bole! What more natural, if her surmises were correct, and the woman was Luke Brevoort's paid spy, than that she should follow him to his home? Hildegarde had no fear for herself—Mary Patterson could disclose her identity, and would, probably, if she remained any time at Pine Bole, but she was ready to leave the Brevoort mansion at a moment's notice. Yet even in so short a time she had become attached to Irma, and earnestly desired to be of assistance to her in her coming conflict with her father.

"Nevertheless," she said, half-aloud, "I am firmly convinced that some mystery attaches to the green vase. I shall discover it, too—and it will be discovered here, if I have but the time to stay. Mary Patterson is the present problem."

A problem to which she could find no solution

just then. She lingered as long in her own room as she felt she could with discretion, wondering not a little how matters would go between Irma and Mr. Bayliss. She felt that Irma's confidence in the young man would not be misplaced—that he was honest enough and chivalrous enough to understand and help her. It was, in fact, her expressed approbation of him which had urged Irma so speedily to the carrying out of her resolve.

On her way downstairs she met Luke Brevoort. He was evidently in wait for her, for when he caught sight of her he motioned her to precede him into the library, instead of allowing her to walk the length of the hall to the drawing-room.

"Allow me the pleasure of your conversation for a few moments," he said. His voice was soft, and glancing at him quickly Hildegard knew that he was well-pleased. It brought a different expression to his face. Thought moves with such rapidity that Hildegard found herself secretly weighing that expression, thinking in her own mind that Luke Brevoort would not be disagreeable if he allowed such sentiments as animated him now to gain ascendancy.

"I have good news for you," he said, without preamble. "I know you are interested, or I should not inflict it on you. I think that Irma will consent to marry Stephen—and I know that he is in love with her."

"He has told you so?" asked Hildegarde, involuntarily.

"No—but my observations—"

Hildegarde put up her hand.

"Sit down, Mr. Brevoort, and let us talk plainly. It won't hurt either of us to do that. Let me talk to you about Irma."

"I should be delighted, Miss Gray, if you would."

"I can not feel toward you like one employed at a salary. There is always a certain deference—one could say timidity between employer and employee. You have made me one of your family, Mr. Brevoort, and I thank you."

"We have made you one of our family because we feel that we can trust you," he answered, kindly enough.

"Yes, I believe that. You asked me to hold no religious discussion with your daughter Irma. It was not necessary, Mr. Brevoort. Discussion could do her neither harm nor good."

He narrowed his eyes, the lids half-closing.

"You will have to explain that, Miss Gray."

"I mean that Irma's resolution is unshakable. I do not think you give your daughter enough credit for strength of purpose."

"I am willing to stake my soul on the fact that she will be the wife of Stephen Bayliss before she is two months older," he said quietly.

Hildegarde regarded him with pity in her glance.

"Why do you so desire this?" she asked, in a gentle tone. "Listen to me—and if my words seem presumptuous, pardon them because of the good feeling that prompts them. You love Irma—you must love her. She has been used to having everything she desired. You have surrounded her with luxury, with pleasure, with advantages. From these you take her and immure her in a solitude. Pine Bole is beautiful, I admit—but how many girls of Irma's rearing could stand it as she has done? Yet she has gone her way quietly determined, because God has spoken to her—God has claimed her allegiance. Don't you realize that there must be something underneath all this?"

He was looking into her earnest face. It was a very lovely face just then, with its dark eyes soft and pleading. She had thrown reserve and restraint aside, and spoken as she felt, and her personality, always an attractive one, was doubly attractive now when the real woman came to the surface.

"Don't *you* realize," he said, "that I am an old man, and that Irma, my daughter, is my only tie? Do you think it is a pleasant thing to see her bury herself in a convent, bury her beauty, her talents, away from the world and from myself, who have spared nothing to show my love for her? There are many others to devote themselves to lives of sacrifice, but she never shall."

Hildegarde understood the depth of this man's resolution and knew that pleading could bear no fruit with him—that Irma would have to set defiance against defiance, hurl strength against strength.

"I suppose it is useless to urge upon you the fact that God wants her—and that God is above and beyond man?" she said.

"I am not religious," said Luke Brevoort, with a sour smile, "so of course such an argument

would be useless with me. I don't believe there is such a thing."

"As God?" asked Hildegarde.

"As God?" he echoed reflectively. "I have never thought much about God. I meant religious calling just then. One has not much chance to think about God when one is a successful business man."

"Yet Mr. Bayliss is a successful business man, and, you say, a good Catholic," remarked the girl.

"Possibly, then, luck accompanied his religious feelings," was the reply. "My dear Miss Gray, it's surprising. Girls of your ability are not generally burdened with such fancies—I can call them nothing else. They generally outgrow them."

"You have been unfortunate in your acquaintance with girls of ability," she said, a little stiffly. Poor Irma! Truly might she dread conflict with this skeptical man!

"It is much too early to retire," he said then, "and I wanted you to come in here so that we could leave the lovers to themselves for a little while." He smiled, and she felt that she hated him anew because of the mockery of that

smile. "If you care to now, we will rejoin them."

She had no objection to make. They found Stephen and Irma discussing, in a casual way, the merits of a composer who, Irma asserted, was Hildegard's favorite, and she turned to her to substantiate the statement. There was no trace in the manner of either of them to indicate the scene through which both had passed, but Hildegard saw signs of it in the calm eyes which Irma turned upon her. She read a serenity there that was new to them. She knew that she herself stood on the brink of a stormy scene, with Mary Patterson so near her, but all personal feelings were swallowed up in concern for her friend.

When ten o'clock came, Mr. Brevoort invited his guest to smoke with him before retiring. Bidding the young ladies good-night both men withdrew. Irma turned to Hildegard hastily, but the latter put her finger to her lips.

"Go to your room—I will follow as soon as I have straightened my music," she said, and Irma obeyed. A few moments later Hildegard followed. Their apartments were on the one floor. As Hildegard walked along the hall to reach Irma, a voice she knew well fell on her ears.



"I beg your pardon," it said, "but I came down stairs to look for the housekeeper and have forgotten my way. Can you tell me on what side the maids sleep?"

Hildegarde hesitated. The woman was on the stairs above her, and the light was dim. A sudden resolution came to her.

"Follow me," she said, "I will show you."

She meant to do so—later on. At that moment she would find out what Mary Patterson was likely to say, and if the worst happened she would go at once to Luke Brevoort, and disclose her identity. Without any suspicion the woman followed her along the hall, and into the rooms which had been given Hildegarde. It was pitch dark.

"Close the door behind you," she said, "I will find matches."

She lighted the lamp—her back turned to Mary Patterson. The latter looked about her in a puzzled fashion—she did not recognize this apartment. She turned for an explanation to the young lady, and found that young lady taking the key from the lock, a half-smile on her parted lips. That moment, it seemed to Hildegarde, was too much like a scene from a blood and thunder drama. It was as if she were taking

part in a play, everything appeared so unreal.

To Mary Patterson it was very real indeed. Had the heavens opened she could not have been more astonished than to raise her eyes to those half-mocking ones which she knew so well, and to see the countenance which she remembered filled with scorn and passion. She shrank back, stifling an exclamation.

"Hildegarde Craig!" she said. Hildegarde bowed ironically.

"At your service—Hildegarde Craig indeed."

"But here—here at Luke Brevoort's!"

"I have as much right to be here as Mary Patterson, I hope," she said. "So you have found the green vase, Miss Patterson? I hope you will be well-rewarded. Take my advice, and don't part with it too easily. I imagine it is most valuable."

"Mr. Brevoort said nothing—he did not tell me you were here—not even when I said you had the—"

Hildegarde raised a warning finger.

"Don't lift your voice. It would not be well for either of us if Luke Brevoort found out that you and I are acquainted."

"Luke Brevoort knows you?"

"Very well—as Miss Gray, his daughter's companion."

She laughed under her breath as she saw the light that leaped into Mary Patterson's face then.

"Don't plan revenge—I am not putting myself in your power without forethought, my good woman. Shall we go to Luke Brevoort together, you and I? He is a fair-minded man when it comes to his own concerns. Let us go now."

She inserted the key again, and stood with her fingers ready to turn it.

"Of course, you know, I shall give him all the information I possess. I shall tell him how I found the Squire of Lady's Hall—his brother, for whose support he paid a certain Mary Patterson a liberal sum. I shall describe the Squire's condition when we reached there, and tell him how the Squire's grand-child paid his funeral expenses. He will doubtless be glad to learn all this. He will like to find out that he is not so good a judge of character as he imagined he was."

Mary Patterson looked at her suddenly. Hildegarde knew that if she hated her then she also feared her.

"What do you want me to do?" she asked.

"Nothing."

"But you threaten—"

"Nothing. If you want to tell Luke Brevoort, do so as soon as ever you like. But if Luke Brevoort finds out that I am Hildegard Craig before I am ready for him to know it, then he shall be compelled to listen to the tale of Mary Patterson—a pleasant tale, indeed, for such a man to hear." She turned the key now, and swung the door open. "I am Miss Gray, Miss Brevoort's companion, and I have never seen you before to-night. If you go up these stairs and turn to your right along the hall you will find the rooms you want."

And Mary Patterson went. Hildegard stood watching her, dubious in her own mind as to the effect of the interview, but determined to carry things through with a high hand. Let the very worst come, what could Luke Brevoort do but order her from his house?

She stood lost in meditation in the center of the room when she heard a light step along the hall. The next instant Irma entered. Her eyes were shining, her beautiful mouth compressed.

"I thought you were coming to my room," she began, half-reproachfully. "I waited so long for you—" . .

"I met some woman in the hall—probably your father's visitor to-night—who had lost her way. I stopped to direct her, and my mind was wandering far afield when you came in. Sit down here with me, Irma—we can talk just as easily here as in your room."

That she was preoccupied was plainly evident, but Irma, in the light of the resolution that had come to her, had no eyes for her.

"My father asked that I wait up for him this evening, Hildegard," she said.

"*This* evening?"

"Yes—it has come. It will be all over in a little while."

"And you will be so upset and unnerved that you will not sleep a wink all night. For pity's sake, Irma, wait until the morning. Sit down here—stay with me. You can tell him you are tired if he comes looking for you, and we will have a good long talk. I have many things to tell you. I am going to trust you with a little secret of my own."

She smiled in spite of herself at the look on Irma's face.

"You have fallen in love with him as well as he with you!" she exclaimed.

"Fallen in love? I? With whom?"

"Hildegarde, don't be mean about it. With Stephen Bayliss, to be sure."

Hildegarde shook her head.

"You'll have to prepare for a disappointment, dear girl. I am not in love with Mr. Bayliss;" her face colored a little and she turned away to hide it. "You told him of yourself to-night?"

"Yes, Hildegarde, I did, and he asked me if I wanted him to leave to-morrow. That he would go willingly but for one reason."

"And that is—" the question came involuntarily.

"You. He is in love with you, Hildegarde."

"Irma, I do not think he is the sort of a man to make such an assertion. You probably misunderstood him. He enjoys my playing—"

"He is falling in love with you and wants me to help him. But I must tell you everything—right from the start, and you will understand it better."

So she commenced, and Hildegarde listened to the very end, without a word of comment or in-

qu岸ry. She smiled at her enthusiastic encomiums which Irma bestowed upon the young man.

"My dear girl, Mr. Bayliss has been with me about four hours of this day—quite a long while I am sure. Long enough to know his own inclinations, you think? No, no, do not let us talk of Mr. Bayliss. I have too much on my mind at present, too much to engross my energies. For my little secret has not to do with love or lovers. I have not had time for either."

"Hildegarde," said Irma, suddenly, "do you know why we trust each other so much? Why, in this short fortnight, we have really learned to care for each other?"

"Yes," said Hildegarde, with a smile, "I know."

"It must be that we recognize each other's earnestness and realness," said Irma musingly.

"These are included, but they are not the reason," said Hildegarde. She opened her valise and took therefrom a small pasteboard box. Lifting the cover she put it on her dressing-table, and then drew a chair close to Irma's.

"I am going to show you something which I have learned to treasure," she said; "tell me if you know anything about it."

She removed a roll of white batting and held up to Irma's view a small green vase. It sparkled brilliantly when the light struck it, and the girl gave an exclamation of admiration.

"How beautiful!" she said. "I have never seen anything so beautiful. Where in the world did you get it? And why do you hide it away?"

"To keep it from your father!" said Hildegarde.

"From—my—father!" Irma stared in perplexity. "My father? What has he to do with this green vase?"

"I wish I knew," said Hildegarde, whimsically; "if I knew that I would know its secret. But at any rate, your words indicate that *you* don't know it. My dear girl, I came here as Miss Gray, a musician whose skill might help to cheer you and make you happy. The young lady originally intended for this position was a Miss Ansonby. She was leaving for the Continent and could not take it, so, knowing I was anxious to get any work that came along, she sent me your father's name. I wrote him, he answered me, and Miss Gray came to you as you know. But I am not Miss Gray."

"You are not Miss Gray?"

"I took that name as being the nearest my



own—Craig. I am Hildegarde Craig, and I came to Pine Bole to see what sort of a man Luke Brevoort was, and also to learn the secret of the green vase you are holding in your hand."

"But—what—" Irma could go no further.

"My dear, it is a long story. We are not altogether strangers. Your father and my mother's father were brothers. Have you ever heard of your uncle—of Daniel Brevoort, the Squire of Lady's Hall?"

"No," said Irma, in a whisper.

"My mother is Daniel Brevoort's daughter—I am one of his grandchildren."

"Then you—you and I are relatives, cousins?"

Hildegarde nodded.

Irma sprang up and threw her arms about the other's neck, kissing her again and again.

"That is why I cared for you—now I know the reason," she said, "the true reason. I am so glad—so very glad, Hildegarde."

The green vase had fallen to the floor unnoticed. Hildegarde returned the girl's caresses warmly.

"Surely," said Irma, "if father knew who you are he would be only too glad to welcome you.

He likes you now as a stranger—what would be his sentiments if you told him—”

“That Hildegarde Craig—who would skin a flea for its hide, as he said to-night—was sitting at his table and associating with his daughter, while all the time the precious green vase he sought so arduously was lying safely hidden in her room—under his own roof.” Hildegarde threw back her head and laughed. “The poor green vase— *Why, Irma!*”

For stooping, on seeing it had fallen from Irma’s lap, she picked up the green vase—no longer round and solid, but neatly severed into two pieces, as if cut by machinery. Thus parted, a small aperture was visible in the center, in which a piece of silk almost the shade of the vase was tightly rolled. Hildegarde gazed at it dumbly. There had always seemed a core of darker shade running through the vase, but Hildegarde had thought this the effect of the play of light and given no further attention to it. She pulled out the little roll, and then held the two sides together, comparing them. Noiselessly they slipped into place, and the vase was whole once more.

Hildegarde stared at Irma, Irma back at Hilde-

garde. They exchanged no words, but eagerly seized on the vase again and held it to the light as before. Not a crack or flaw was visible—it still sparkled brilliantly, and there was still the darker core running through the center.

“Hildegarde, it is magic,” said Irma, in an awed whisper. “Why—it does not seem possible that we’ve had the vase opened, you and I, and that here it is closed again. Are you sure we aren’t dreaming?”

But Hildegarde’s fingers held the tiny roll of silk.

“By this I know I am not dreaming,” she said. “Here is the secret of the green vase, Irma. Shall we look at it?”

“If you will allow me—” began Irma, but Hildegarde had unfolded it, and held it open with her hands, while she brought it nearer to the lamp. In bold and striking white characters upon the dark background there were outlined the words:

“THE LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT OF  
DANIEL BREVOORT.”

The room swam before Hildegarde. The strangeness of it all seemed to overpower her, so

that she could read no further. Florence's peculiar sensation in regard to this, her own appropriation of it, Mary Patterson's desperate search, Luke Brevoort's efforts to recover it, all came before her in a rush. It seemed as if the incidents had been strung together by a power above her own. She knew it when her eyes glanced hastily through the next lines. She saw enough there to tell her why Luke Brevoort wanted the green vase.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## HILDEGARDE'S TREASURE.

"You might speak to me," said Irma, after a while, "or have the words you are reading bewitched you? What is it, Hildegarde?"

"I can not tell you," said Hildegarde. "It is the disposition of some property, and the bequeathing of it to my mother." She hesitated. "Your father will know what it is, probably, when I speak of it to him."

"Then you mean to tell father the truth?"

Hildegarde was busy rolling up the silk into a little green wad again. Taking the vase, she laid the two side by side, and packed them in the pasteboard box once more.

"I intend to tell him, Irma, as soon as you have forced him to come to some sort of a decision." She smiled at her affectionately, but her face was very pale. "You are all that is keeping me at Pine Bole."

"And Mr. Bayliss?" asked Irma.

"Who would dream that a girl with a religious vocation could be such a matchmaker!" said Hildegarde. "Actually a matchmaker! Much good it would do me to stay at Pine Bole because of Mr. Bayliss! No, no, you can't talk like that to me, Irma."

"I wish you would be serious about him," said Irma.

"I am not laughing at him," said Hildegarde.

"I know you're not. But suppose—"

Hildegarde shook her head.

"My dear girl, I won't suppose. Mr. Bayliss and I are strangers, and will have to stay so, that is all."

With these words she dismissed the subject, and she and Irma sat talking, exchanging confidences, for the next two hours. Hildegarde told the girl all about Lady's Hall, her mother, and her sister Florence. She said nothing of their going to Lady's Hall, of the Squire's evident poverty, or the state in which they found his home. Briefly she touched on her own life, given up to the pursuit of an art she loved.

"Not alone for love's sake," she said, "but because of necessity."

"It must be a pleasure to have money that one

has honestly earned," remarked Irma, who had listened with eagerness to Hildegarde's description of her home and her people.

Hildegarde smiled.

"Yes, it is—work is a blessing for which even the best of us fail to be grateful enough, I think. Nevertheless, when lack of money is an actual fact on the one hand, and lack of work another—then I think the shoe of poverty begins to pinch. It's a shoe that few of us are satisfied to wear through life."

"Would you like to be wealthy?" asked Irma.

"No," said Hildegarde, gravely—almost, it seemed to Irma, with a shudder. "I would not, for too much money carries a curse with it. I should like an income sufficient to keep the three of us in comfortable circumstances, and allow us an occasional luxury now and again. But if we had enough to supply us with needful things, I could take care of the luxury."

Irma looked at her.

"How confidently you speak," she said; "you see, Hildegarde, it is something new for me to meet any one who has been thrown upon her own resources. And that it should be one of my own

family! Surely if my father knew he would see to it—he admires you so much now, Hildegarde, that he will think all the more of you when he finds out the truth.”

“Oh, yes,” said Hildegarde, half-jestingly. “I can only hope you are not present at the interview. When he discovers that I am the daughter of Florence Craig he will welcome me with open arms.”

“But even if he dislikes your mother, he likes you,” said Irma. “He must be just.” She looked at the clock—it was after midnight. “Well, I’ll go to bed. You see I’ve taken your advice and put off the thunderstorm for another few hours.”

She kissed her affectionately, and went away, leaving Hildegarde to a much-desired solitude, but not to rest. For the secret of the green vase danced in her brain and would not be suppressed. She had learned the reason of Luke Brevoort’s anxiety to secure it. It meant fortune and good name to him.

For it set forth, in clear and legal language, the sale of certain real estate holdings and a certain sum given to Luke Brevoort, which sum was to be deposited to the credit of his daughter



Florence or her legal heirs. This much Hildegard had been able to gather in her brief and hurried survey, but it sufficed to show her how dangerous the green vase was to Luke Brevoort's peace of mind.

"He must be just," Irma had said. Hildegard smiled. Yes, when justice was forced on him. And then another thought made her jump to her feet, cross the room, and lock the door securely. Supposing Mary Patterson, undeterred by fear of consequences, went to Luke Brevoort and told him that "Miss Gray" was indeed Hildegard Craig, and that the green vase was probably in her possession at that very moment? Surely they would never think her venturesome enough to bring it with her to Pine Bole—but then again, why should she not, seeing that she was not supposed to know its real value?

"Mary Patterson tried to rob me of it once," she said, half-aloud. "What if she should try it again—this time successfully?"

She laughed at her own fears, but they had taken such a hold on her that she prayed to her guardian angel with even more than her usual fervor to be protected through the night. On the morrow, she felt, Irma would tell her father the

worst. Hildegarde would then disclose her identity, and her knowledge of the secret which Luke Brevoort was endeavoring to hide, and would bid farewell to Pine Bole forever. She lay awake a long while, wondering what the grim old man would say to her, and how he would act. Thus wondering she fell asleep.

Her rest was a broken one. An hour slipped by—the second and the third. The dusky mansion was wrapped in gloom and silence. Then two figures seem to spring out of the darkness of one of the corridors. They met silently. Not a word was spoken, as they moved stealthily along the hall and stopped at Hildegarde's door. The knob was turned very softly. Then a whispered consultation seemed to take place, and one figure moved away, went down along the passage, and stepped out through a window at the end, to the veranda which ran around the entire second story. Very quietly the intruder stole along the veranda until he reached Hildegarde's window. He tried it—there were no catches, and raised it easily. Another instant and he was inside.

But slight as had been his movements they were enough to rouse the girl, who, always a light sleeper, had her senses more acutely on the alert

on this night. She turned on her pillow and listened—then raised herself on one elbow.

“Who is there?” she called sharply. “Who is in this room?”

There was no answer—in words. She sat up altogether then, intending to strike a light, when she heard the swift movement of a heavy body across the apartment. The next instant a cloth was pressed against her face, she caught a breath of some sweet, sickening odor and knew no more.

\*       \*       \*       \*       \*

It was Irma Brevoort who aroused her by shaking her over and over until consciousness broke through her numbed senses. She opened her eyes dully. Her head was splitting, her throat parched, her whole body in a fever.

“Hildegarde, wake up,” the girl kept saying, and there was an undercurrent of fright in her tones now. “Wake up, wake up! It is nearly nine o’clock!”

Hildegarde tried to repeat the words after her, but the pain in her head dazed her. She tried to lift her hand, but even as she did so was falling off to sleep again. Irma, hastily dipping a towel in the water pitcher, passed it over her face and

throat, and once more Hildegarde opened her eyes.

"Jump up," she said; "you are ill, Hildegarde. Let me help you, dear." She sat her up in bed, tried to stand her on her feet, but the effects of the drug had not yet worn off. Hildegarde put her hands to her head with a low cry of pain.

"Oh, what is the matter with me?" she ejaculated in thick tones. "What has happened?"

"My dear, you are ill—I will call Mrs. Wheeler," said Irma, now thoroughly frightened. She ran out of the room, almost into the arms of Stephen Bayliss, who, pale and worried, was walking along the corridor.

"Miss Gray—" he began, hurriedly.

"Oh, she is frightfully ill," said Irma. "I am going to call Mrs. Wheeler. Some one had better go for a doctor at once. Tell my father, will you, Mr. Bayliss? I think you will find him in the morning-room—he generally goes there after breakfast."

She was too much perturbed to notice the pallor of the young man's face. She went for Mrs. Wheeler, who responded immediately, and five minutes later a servant was despatched for the nearest physician. Mrs. Wheeler saw at once that

Hildegarde was suffering from no ordinary ailment. She glanced about the room. The window was wide open, the room in confusion.

"It seems as if there have been thieves here," she said. "Everything is tossed about so—look around you, Miss Irma."

"Good heavens," said Irma, "that must be it! Why, I was with her until one o'clock this morning, too." She stooped and picked up a roll of white wadding from the floor. A little further on lay the pasteboard box. "The green vase," she said, in a whisper, "the green vase is gone!"

To Hildegarde, sitting benumbed on the side of the bed, the words came with almost horrible distinctness. She clutched at her throat.

"Irma!" she breathed, so low that Mrs. Wheeler scarcely heard, "the green vase?"

Mrs. Wheeler looked at Irma Brevoort in warning.

"It is all right, Hildegarde," she said, soothingly.

"They—have—taken—it!" said Hildegarde. "Irma, look—look—look—"

"Yes, Hildegarde?"

"Look inside the wadding—a piece of silk—the secret—you know—"

Irma understood at once; she had seen her draw out the closely rolled wad of silk from the small hole in the center of the vase. She opened the wadding hurriedly and shook it. A small object fell to the ground.

"It is here, Hildegard," she said. "Only the vase is gone."

An expression of satisfaction stole across Hildegard's face.

"Give it—to—Mr. Bayliss," she said, and sank off once more into unconsciousness.

Later, in spite of her father's keen anxiety and many inquiries, Irma kept this incident from him. The doctor said that Hildegard was in no danger—that as soon as the effects of the chloroform wore off she would be as well as ever. Stephen Bayliss haunted the hall outside her room until he heard this. It was Irma who told it to him, and gave him the little wad of silk which Hildegard had bidden her put into his care.

"What is it?" he asked, curiously.

"I do not know," answered Irma. "It is something she considers of great value, something she is afraid of losing. Her last words to me were to give it to you."

The young man's heart bounded. Hildegard's

confidence made him very happy. He placed the treasure carefully in his wallet. It did not matter to him at that moment what its worth might be—to him it was simply beyond value as an indication of Hildegarde's trust.

"How soon do you think it will be before Miss Gray recovers?" asked Luke Brevoort of the young man. There was a singular elation about Luke Brevoort to-day—a suppressed excitement not noticeable in his manner before. Stephen Bayliss, on the contrary, was reserved, cold, and preoccupied.

"I do not know," he answered. "We have only the doctor's say-so. It may be days—it may be a week. It is a most unfortunate occurrence."

Luke Brevoort stared straight before him.

"Yes," he said in a peculiar tone, "a most unfortunate occurrence. But doesn't it strike you as singularly queer that Miss Gray's room was the only one touched—that no other room in the house was entered but hers?"

Stephen Bayliss was looking at him intently.

"Yes, it is strange," he said, "now that you mention it, very strange." His voice had a meaning which escaped Luke Brevoort's ear.

"Well," went on the older man, "by some

means it has come to my knowledge that Miss Gray is masquerading here—in other words that this young lady's name is not Gray."

"Not Gray!" Stephen Bayliss started. "What do you mean?"

"Sit down—calm yourself. These sort of women often exercise a fascination over the masculine heart. I will even acknowledge that I, myself, considered her charming."

"But you must surely have some authority for this statement," said Stephen Bayliss, hotly. Luke Brevoort raised his eyebrows, a smile on his thin lips.

"Why this concern?" he asked. "Miss Gray is nothing to you."

"Nothing—of course." Stephen Bayliss sank back in his chair. "Nevertheless, she doesn't look like a—well, like—"

"An adventuress? No, she doesn't. But if she looked like one she would have a good deal of trouble passing herself off as a respectable young woman. However, what interest I had in her was due to her singular talents, and now that she has been exposed—"

"An ugly word to use in connection with a lady," said Stephen Bayliss. "You have proof



positive that Miss Gray is not what she seems—you are sure?"

"So sure that I shall permit Irma to see as little of her as possible, and as soon as she recovers sufficiently, I will send her away from Pine Bole. These things are always best done very quietly, you know."

"Yes—and other things," said Stephen Bayliss. "You have no idea who entered Miss Gray's room last night?"

Luke Brevoort shrugged his shoulders.

"I have no interest in the matter, I assure you. As I said before, young women of that character have a doubtful following. It is perhaps, fortunate that we were not all murdered in our beds. Only that we shall leave Pine Bole so soon I would set a guard at night. As it is, I shall be extra careful until we see the last of her."

"You do not—pardon me if I seem suspicious—connect the coming of that Patterson woman with this affair of Miss Gray's?"

He was not looking at Luke Brevoort—at least not directly. But out of the corner of his eye he saw the sudden start, the expression that flashed across the older man's face—the amazement, not

unmixed with alarm, that vanished almost as quickly as it came.

"Well, now, that is a curious question," he said, "a very curious question. What do you mean by it, Mr. Bayliss?"

There was a challenging note in his voice.

"What can I mean by it but what I say?" he said. "The fact of the matter is that I never liked the Patterson woman. She seems to be a good type of a low-born adventuress, if you want some one to whom to apply that unpleasant word. And I do not trust her. She would be capable of anything."

"The Patterson woman is no longer here," said Luke Brevoort, slowly. "She left this morning."

"Oh!" said Stephen Bayliss.

"Yes—I am not defending the Patterson woman. She told me she didn't have the green vase last night. But she set her price this morning, gave me the green vase, and left the house."

Stephen Bayliss was silent.

"Of course, I am delighted at getting my hands upon this treasure," pursued Luke Brevoort; "and would have been willing to pay any sum for it. Her demands, however, considering the trouble she took to get it for me, were not excessive."

"It is to the Patterson creature, then, that Miss Gray owes what you might be pleased to term the exposure of her true character?" said Bayliss, calmly.

"Oh, now," with a short laugh, "you exceed the bounds of friendship. I can not tell you any more about Miss Gray—that will remain a secret between her and myself, for I have a desire to be lenient with her in this matter. A common sense talk may do her a world of good. She does not seem a hardened criminal, and probably if she has a chance to regain her own self-respect—"

"Don't!" said Stephen Bayliss. "Don't!" He was greatly excited now, and Mr. Brevoort rose to his feet in calm astonishment. "Er—pardon me—one does not like to feel that deception and trickery can live so close to a beautiful and pure girl like your daughter Irma. I am greatly shocked, Mr. Brevoort—more shocked than I can find words to say."

"Well, well," said Luke Brevoort, "you are young, Bayliss, and while not inexperienced in the world's ways, apt to let your feelings carry you out of yourself. Miss Gray is only one of a type. I must try to make it as easy as possible for Irma. She is a very sensitive girl, and like me, has given

great credence to this newcomer. You will help me, Bayliss, I hope, in distracting her attention until such time as I can dispose of Miss Gray?"

"I shall be only too happy to be of use to you or Miss Irma," was the conventional response. "Only," and again there was a strange note in his voice, "I do not envy you your task of telling her."

"I dread it, my dear boy, I dread it," said Luke Brevoort. But the animation of his features belied his words. "Perhaps I am too lenient. My joy at recovering the vase does not let me see the real enormity of this young woman's offense."

He felt forced to excuse the beaming expression which he knew he wore, and which, he also knew, Stephen Bayliss observed.

"Of course you are not accusing her of any crime," said Stephen Bayliss, curiously.

"Dear me, no—if she contemplated any, her schemes have been nipped in the bud, I am happy to say. Not many would have escaped so fortunately."

## CHAPTER XIV.

## MANY REVELATIONS.

"I HAVE been, my dear, most indulgent, you will admit," finished Luke Brevoort. "I have said nothing to you while Miss Gray was ill, not wishing to hurt you. But Miss Gray is well now—entirely her own self, in fact, and I deem it my duty to inform you that all intercourse between you must cease."

Irma Brevoort had been listening. She was quite pale, but her lips were set in a determined fashion.

"You will, of course, give me a reason, father, for this ostracism of Miss Gray?"

"I have said that she has come here under an assumed name, under false pretenses. More I can not tell you until we are rid of her, which shall be within the hour."

"I know that her name is Craig, not Gray," said Irma, calmly. "I know that she is Florence Craig's eldest child, and that her mother is your brother's daughter."

Luke Brevoort fell back in his chair, staring at Irma as if she had suddenly gone mad.

"I suppose you've discovered this, too," she went on, "and you want to convince me that it is a crime. I don't consider it a crime, father. She wanted the money, and saw a way to earn it. And she has earned it, too, and I really care for her—care for her as if she were my own sister."

"You will soon forget this nonsense," said Luke Brevoort, "in addition to your other nonsense. You could not live out of a convent, you remember? Yet I do not think you find the society of Stephen Bayliss so galling—if all I have noticed these last few days is a fact."

He smiled triumphantly. Irma braced herself as if for a shock.

"Mr. Bayliss," she said slowly, "is in love with Miss Gray."

Luke Brevoort's fingers closed tightly around the arm of the chair.

"Mr. Bayliss also knows," went on the girl, in a clear voice, "that I have promised myself to God, and that I intend to enter a convent at the earliest opportunity."

Luke Brevoort did not move—not an eyelash quivered.

“I have waited a long while now, father,” she went on, and there was a tremor in the clear tones, “oh, such a long, long while. You must give your consent—don’t you understand that it is a power stronger than myself that compels me to this step?”

Luke Brevoort sat back and his eyes were like those of a stranger, so cold were they, and so cruel. He looked at her, but she met his glance bravely enough. She was so determined to choose her own career, and to do as she thought God expected of her, that she lost her natural terror of this cold, stern man. Something almost fiendish leaped into his face as he gazed at her! His pride in her was swallowed up by the thought that she had defied him, and a smile that struck a chill to her heart played around his lips.

“I think I know enough about your wretched convents—especially the Order which you are so determined to enter—to believe myself safe in asserting that those whom they accept must be free from blemish or afflictions, inherited or otherwise?”

Irma's eyes widened. Something in his manner frightened her.

"That is true," she said.

He laughed softly.

"You can enter, as you call it, whenever it suits you. But you will tell them, please, that your mother is an incurable maniac, and is still alive in a private madhouse in this State."

Irma rose to her feet unsteadily.

"My mother?"

"Yes, your mother. She is an insane woman. And her mother before her was mad. Tell that to your precious religious house when it suits you to go to it."

The girl swayed to and fro, with horror-stricken eyes fastened upon him. And he was human underneath, if cruelly harsh and brutal. That wounded look, that ashy face, those parted lips as she turned them on him, were to live in his memory many a day.

"My mother—a madwoman! My mother! And you knew and never told me! Never told me until now! Oh, father!" Her voice sank to a low whisper. "May God forgive you—may God help me to forgive you! Oh, father, father!"



She turned toward the door, groped toward it blindly, but did not have the strength to close it behind her. She could not see, think, or feel. She wanted Hildegarde. She wanted to put her head upon the bosom of that faithful friend.

"Oh, cruel!" she whispered over and over. "Cruel, cruel, cruel!"

Some one met her outside, and spoke to her. She knew the voice belonged to Stephen Bayliss, but she could not see his face.

"Take me to Hildegarde," she said; "only take me to Hildegarde."

He did not know what was the matter, but the agony of her face startled him. He knew that Hildegarde was in her own little sitting-room. Passing his arm through Irma's and bidding her lean upon him, he half-carried her up the stairs and into Hildegarde's presence. She, pale and tired-looking, with dark circles under her eyes, was seated at the window gazing out across the tops of the pines to the beautiful purple mountains. She turned her head at the knock and bade them enter. When she saw Irma's face she sprang to her feet.

"Good heavens, what is it?" she exclaimed. "Mr. Bayliss, what has happened?"

"I want Hildegarde," muttered Irma. "Only Hildegarde."

"I am here, dear," said Hildegarde, putting her arms about her. "My poor child, what has happened? Are you ill?"

She pressed her warmly to her. Stephen Bayliss would have withdrawn, but Hildegade, with a look, bade him remain. He helped put her in a chair, and stood up beside the two, not a little perplexed. Irma's eyes flared open, her white lips moved.

"I told him—the truth," she said. "And he told me—oh, Hildegarde—that I could never enter—could never take up the life I love—because my mother—my mother—is insane.

Hildegarde shuddered. Stephen Bayliss's hands gripped together, and a hot wave of indignation swept over him.

"My child," said Hildegarde, then, tenderly, her voice quivering, "don't give way so. He may be telling you this to frighten you—he would stoop to anything to keep you from the religious life. Why do you give in so easily, Irma? Is this the brave girl I have known for almost three weeks? Come now, come now—don't despair. He will have to prove this to your satisfaction—you will

not believe his mere assertion when you know how determined he is to persuade you to another way of thinking? Mr. Bayliss, do you think he is speaking the truth?"

"I doubt it very much," said Stephen Bayliss; "it was probably invented on the spur of the moment."

But Irma struggled out of Hildegarde's arms, and put both hands to her heaving bosom.

"I feel the truth of it here," she said. "Oh, that I could believe he did not mean it! I have felt for days that some frightful danger was hanging over my head—now the blow has fallen. Good-by, dear life," she whispered, "good-by, cherished ambition! For even if, knowing it is true, the nuns would receive me, I would be afraid to burden them with my unknown future. My mother, he said, and her mother before her! I would not dare go, Hildegarde, I would not dare. My heart is broken!"

And Hildegarde took her in her arms again, as the bitter tears came to her eyes, and Stephen Bayliss left them to themselves.

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How she comforted the girl—what she said to her Hildegarde never knew afterward. The blow

had indeed fallen on Irma Brevoort, and no consolation that Hildegarde could give seemed adequate. Her first endeavor was to distract her mind from herself, by some means to turn it, in pity, to the afflicted woman who had lived so many years without a single thought or kind word from the child to whom she had given birth. Hildegarde tried to show her what good she might do in the world—how many unfortunates she could reach—how, indeed, they would see more of each other and be able to help each other in the work that they would plan together.

All this fell on ears that were actually dulled; the calamity seemed so great, then, that in her first realization of it she could not conquer her despair. She had no feelings of resentment against her father—that might come later on, perhaps, when she had time to think it all over. And Hildegarde's gentle words and tender caresses helped her in her dark hour. Nor did she know, poor girl, as she sat comforting the daughter of her enemy, that her own dark hour was approaching nearer and nearer—that it was even then at the gate of Pine Bole.

“A telegram for Miss Gray.”

Those were the words in which her greatest sor-

row took shape. Hildegarde glanced up at Mrs. Wheeler as she tore it open. She did not cry out as she read the brief line it contained, but her face went ashen.

“Mother dying. Come at once.”

And it was signed “Florence.”

Irma, stricken and helpless, sat staring at Hildegarde. She knew that some great catastrophe brought that look to her face, but she could not ask her what it was. And Hildegarde was not one to add to another’s burdens. She turned to Mrs. Wheeler.

“Miss Irma has had a shock,” she said; “will you be good to her for the next few days? I know how truly you care for her, the only one, perhaps in all this house that does. Irma, dear girl, I must go home at once. My sister has sent me word that my mother needs me.”

Irma watched her without a word. Hildegarde put her arms about her and kissed her.

“Bear up, dear child. It will not be long before we are together again. Come, help me get my things packed. You will feel better helping me. You, too, Mrs. Wheeler, if you are not busy?”

I must catch that next train to the city, and from there go to Cliffden. It is a long journey. I shall not reach there until morning."

It took but a short while to do the packing—there was not much of it, for Hildegarde had brought little to Pine Bole with her. They were in the midst of it when Luke Brevoort sent a message, saying that he would like to see Miss Gray in the library. Hildegarde glanced at the clock hurriedly—then went out of the room and down the stairs. She entered the library without ceremony, and stood just inside the door, her dark eyes shining out of her white face, her lips almost as white. If Luke Brevoort meant to triumph over her, he put the idea away from him when her voice sounded in his ears. She waited for no word from him.

"You cruel, wicked man," she said, in a low and bitter tone; "have you not done enough harm in your long life, to spare your own child?"

"My dear Miss——"

"Don't hesitate. You know my name. You know I am Florence Craig's daughter—your brother Daniel's grandchild. Your brother Daniel, whom you left to the care of a servant as mean

and grasping in her way as you were in yours, who starved him and neglected him, and let him die while you sat in the luxury which his wealth had brought you. There is a just God, Luke Brevoort although you don't believe in Him, and your day of retribution is at hand." She leaned toward him, her breath coming fast through her white and parted lips. "You and Mary Patterson between you nearly killed Hildegarde Craig to secure the green vase. But have you opened it? No? Then you are still unaware that its secret is mine, and that Daniel Brevoort's will is in safe keeping. Now, Luke Brevoort, what good is all your ill-gotten wealth to you? And what will you have left when you are forced to restore to Florence Craig or her legal heirs that which does not belong to you?"

Luke Brevoort had carefully planned his words to this young woman. He had expected to hear her recriminations and treat them with scorn. He knew that she must realize that between them he and Mary Patterson had secured the long-looked-for treasure, and he was prepared to meet her accusations with sneering defiance. He was to humble her, first—humble her to the ground. and

then, relenting, fling her a small sum as compensation for the suffering which she had undergone, bid her go from Pine Bole, and forget that such a man as Luke Brevoort existed. He had wondered, not without secret triumph, how she would take it, what she would say, and how her defiance would stoop to accept his beneficent offer. For with Luke Brevoort, money was the power that makes the world go round. He loved money—not, as most of us do, for the things it gives us—but for its own sake. He loved it fondly, as all his servants and dependents knew—as every one knew but his daughter Irma, who only guessed at his great craving for wealth. And now Hildegard Craig stood before him indeed, with flashing, scornful eyes, with contempt on her face, and with knowledge, above all, of the secret of the green vase. She defied him, and she had the upper hand, not he. His scheming had come to nothing, the gold he loved had been taken from him—the best part of it, indeed, for he knew that when the reckoning day came, justice to his brother's legal heirs would almost ruin him.

He could not believe his senses as Hildegard Craig ceased speaking, and she, looking at him



knew that he had not bargained for this—that she had gained, perhaps, the first victory any one had ever gained over this hard and grasping man.

“Dirt and starvation and misery unspeakable—a lonely old age—his child kept from him by your machinations and by connivance with a creature as vile as yourself, for money’s sake. This was what Daniel Brevoort, your brother, endured during those long years. When we came, my mother, my sister, and myself, we found him lying dead in his chair, where he had died—alone. We found a woman who had grown inhuman in the course of the years, who appropriated to her own uses every penny you sent, and would have appropriated—probably did, for I heard nothing of it—the money you sent to bury him. His grandchild, I, Hildegard Craig, paid his funeral expenses. Not one word of comfort did he have during those long and lonely years. The man who had defrauded him lived in comfort and luxury, and lied to Florence Craig concerning him. Every letter was intercepted by your paid dependent.” She smiled bitterly. “You probably don’t believe in the law of retribution, either—but I do. You are an old man now—and retribution has begun. For the privations which my mother has

been forced to endure, for the loneliness of your only brother, for the anguish you have brought upon your own child—for all these things God has made me His instrument of vengeance. Dearer than your own life you love money, and I shall exact from you every penny you have unlawfully acquired. Good-by, Luke Brevoort."

She went out and shut the door behind her—not tottering blindly, as Irma had done an hour since—not crushed or humiliated as he had pictured her. And he sat silent, his head fallen forward on his chest, his face pallid.

Poor Irma did her very best to set aside her sorrow while Hildegarde remained with her, and although the latter tried to dissuade her from accompanying her to the station, she would not be put off. Stephen Bayliss, grave and silent, drove them there. Unaccountably attracted by Hildegarde Craig, even from the first moment of their acquaintance, subsequent events had done much to fan the fire in his heart to a flame. So that now, looking at her quiet face, at her tightly-closed lips, at her shadowed eyes, he would have given much to be able to take her in his arms and tell her of his love for her. But conventionality stood between them. Her sorrow engrossed her.

and he was forced for the time being to take a secondary place.

"Irma gave you something to keep for me the morning I was taken so ill?" said Hildegarde, at last, rousing herself. Perhaps the young man's silent concentration of mind upon her brought her thoughts to him.

"Yes," he answered briefly, "you want it?"

"Oh, no," she said. "I trust it to you. It is very precious—too precious to come into my keeping again—they might try once more to take it from me. Keep it for me, Mr. Bayliss, and afterward, when this trouble is over—when—when—my mother is better," she hesitated a little and turned her face away, "I shall ask your advice concerning it."

She did not see the expression of the young man's eyes—they were staring straight in front of him.

"I thank you for your confidence, Miss Gray," he said; "I appreciate it more than words can convey to you."

"It is I who must return you thanks," she said; "not you."

"Perhaps I can help you a little when the time comes to act," he went on. "I have learned a good

deal, from my own observation first, and then from what Miss Irma has been kind enough to tell me this last few days. I shall probably not stay very much longer at Pine Bole—and as my vacation is not nearly ended, perhaps Cliffden—that is the name of the place? You see I would be able to combine business and pleasure—always desirable.”

He smiled, half-deprecatingly.

“Lady’s Hall, Cliffden—old Squire Brevoort’s mansion,” she said, almost mechanically. “My sister and my mother are there now—please God will still be there when you come.”

“Please God,” he echoed, reverently.

They had not long to wait for the train, but as it came puffing along the tracks Irma’s composure gave way and she clung to Hildegard almost in terror.

“I can’t let you go—you’re all I have,” she said; “the only one left to give me a grain of comfort.”

“Irma darling, you can come soon. I will write to you at once. Mother is subject to heart attacks, and may be entirely recovered by the time I reach Lady’s Hall. If you can manage it at all, come to us.”

But the girl was strong, in spite of the agony she was enduring, and the momentary terror passed. After the first shrinking of fear and sense of loss she kissed her quietly several times, and then released her. Stephen Bayliss took Hildegard's hand and wrung it warmly.

"If I could but say what I want to say to you," he whispered, then. "It shall be my daily prayer that God will bless me enough to give me the right. It is horrible to let you go away like this—and on such a sorrowful journey."

It was the first time Hildegard had ever experienced the sense of protection. She could not resent these tones, nor resist the earnestness on his face. Her independence took second place; her pride no longer restrained her. With tear-filled eyes she looked at him.

"It will soon be over," she murmured; "very, very soon."

Conventional words, but the tone, the clinging grasp of her fingers, the sudden color in her cheeks, were eloquent. He saw her safely aboard the train, then stood beside Irma, watching her as she seated herself close to the window. She smiled at them pathetically as the train moved out of the station. Her eyes lingered lovingly on

Irma's flower-like face, and then turned, with a feeling of restfulness, to the tall form beside her. No woman could mistake the look on his manly countenance, and at sight of it, Hildegarde felt her cheeks flushing once more.

## CHAPTER XV.

## IN WHICH ALL IS ENDED.

HER third journey to Cliffden! Hildegarde felt she would never be able to forget it.

It seemed to her as if that day would never end—as if the cars fairly crept along. She was fortunate in reaching New York City in time to catch the last train to Cliffden. And when, toward morning, she slipped out upon the platform she was so exhausted by her anxiety and lack of food—for she had not been able to swallow a morsel—that her trembling limbs could scarcely support her weight.

How she reached Lady's Hall was always a mystery to her, but at last, after an age it seemed, she stood upon its dark threshold. She tottered against the door, and leaned her body on it as she knocked for admission.

Mrs. Hardy, Lucy's mother, opened to her. She gave an exclamation of alarm as she caught a glimpse of Hildegarde's face, white and worn. The girl stepped into the hall.

"My mother!" she whispered rather than spoke.

"Alive still—but asking for you continually. Miss Florence is with her."

"Alive! Thank God!" said Hildegarde. She dropped her bag, and then removed her gloves and hat as she went rapidly toward her mother's room. The door was open. Lucy Hardy was standing at a small table, measuring some liquid on a teaspoon, while Hildegarde caught sight of Florence bending over the bed. In another instant she, too, was at the dying woman's side, and a cry of love and anguish burst from her lips.

"My mother, my dear mother!" she said.

A look of ineffable joy passed over Mrs. Craig's pinched features.

"My Hildegarde! I could not die until I had seen you once more!"

It was death—that Hildegarde knew, looking at her. Her face was drawn and blue, her eyes sunken. Already the cold sweat had gathered upon her forehead. It was only a question of a few hours at the very utmost. With gentle touch and comforting words Hildegarde knelt beside her mother's bed. There was nothing now left for the two girls to do but to soothe her with what



composure they could assume, until the end arrived.

"Do not worry about Florence or me," she said. after a while. "I have found out the secret, dear. Grandfather did really leave you, his dear daughter, and your children, all the money realized from the sale of his real estate. He hid his will in the green vase, mother—his spirit must have been warning Florence that day we came here first—and I found it. Dear, dear mother, it seems a pity that you can not be with us just a little while longer to enjoy that which is rightfully your own."

"Dear heart," said the mother faintly, "I was only worrying about you. I leave our Florence on the road to perfect health—she does not look it now, because she is worn out watching me—and in the hands of a good man. I fretted only about you, Hildegarde. Oh, my dear Hildegarde, death is not such a bitter thing to one who has seen death come so often. I am glad to go, dear. Do not sorrow too much for me—rejoice that you have been my good and faithful daughter, that you have loved me tenderly, and cared for me, and that you have my blessing. Your dear father waits for me, and my children—all my little ones."

A great sob burst from Florence. The mother looked at her pityingly.

"My poor little daughter! Be good to her, Hildegarde, my love, be good to her."

Hildegarde's arm tightened about her mother's shoulders.

"Oh, my mother, you have earned your rest," she said; "you have earned it indeed."

And it was thus, with Florence holding her hand, with Hildegarde's arm about her, and their tender voices, choked with tears, rising in the prayers that our holy Mother Church gives us for the comfort and help of the departing soul, that Mrs. Craig left her children. There was a smile on the patient lips as her head fell back, a peaceful expression on the comely face. She had indeed, fought the good fight, had earned her rest. Hildegarde laid her tenderly upon the pillow, and stood, with her arm about her sister, looking down on the quiet, silent form. After a few moments Mrs. Hardy came in. Hildegarde watched her close the sightless eyes and fold the thin hands upon her breast. Not until then did she realize that her mother was dead. The room swam before her. She was weak still from the effects of her illness, and that long and exhausting day and

night had not helped to give her strength for this trying ordeal. Between them Mrs. Hardy and Florence caught her as she fell.

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So once more the body of a Brevoort was laid in the Lady's Room; once more the beautiful sculptured face of the Mother of the Redeemer looked down compassionately on the quiet dead. Neither Hildegarde nor Florence took a moment's rest during the next few days. Their beloved dead was to remain with them so short a while that they could not bear to stay away from her.

To Hildegarde it all seemed like a ghastly dream. She had no time to think of Luke Brevoort or his daughter—or of Stephen Bayliass. She knew that kindly Mrs. Hardy brought her food, and that to please her she ate it. She was merely conscious of the presence of Tom Phelps— young, handsome, gentle as a woman—ready at any moment to be of service. All she could realize was that her mother was dead, and it came home to her with such bitter force that there was room for nothing but just that thought. So when, the morning of the funeral, Stephen Bayliss walked quietly into the room, and knelt beside the body

of the woman soon to be laid in the quaint church-yard she had room for no surprise—merely a faint smile of welcome, more pitiful than tears, a fluttering handclasp. She asked no questions—she wanted nothing but to be left alone with her great sorrow, her deep agony.

And he respected her grief and stood aloof, one with her in sympathy, suffering with her, indeed, as he saw the long-drawn sobs rend her entire body as she knelt with bowed head during the solemn requiem Mass. He had no right, he felt, to stand beside her, but as the body of Mrs. Craig was being lowered into the ground, and he saw Tom Phelps move nearer to the weeping Florence, he could not resist the impulse, then, to skirt the little crowd of mourners and lay his hand gently on Hildegarde's arm. She did not feel the touch. Her eyes were strained anxiously toward the rapidly-filling grave. But she did not repulse him, he felt, and he knelt at her side, therefore, when the priest began to say the first few prayers, and helped her to her feet when all was over.

Afterward she remembered with gratitude his gentleness and tenderness. He had much to tell her, and when she was able to listen, a few days later, he gave her messages from Irma, and from

Luke Brevoort, too—who bade him express his entire willingness to do her justice. Hildegard listened to it all with a faint smile.

“Money is of little value to me now,” she said. “It is robbed of even its possibilities. For I must work to forget—I must work hard. Only in work and much of it can I bury my sorrow.” The tears gathered in her eyes, but she forced them back. Stephen Bayliss could not take his eyes from the pale face he had grown to love.

“You remember the night you were taken ill at Pine Bole?” he said.

She nodded briefly, thankful that he had thus changed the subject, giving her time to recover herself.

“I went, if you can remember, out on the veranda, to smoke with Luke Brevoort. We had barely finished one cigar, when he said that he wanted to speak to his daughter before she retired. I threw my cigar away and followed him, and bade him good-night at my door.

“But when I got inside I was fairly haunted by the incidents of that eventful day. I could not get Miss Irma’s story out of my mind. I tried to read, but found it impossible. So I thought of going down and out to the veranda again and

smoking another cigar by way of quieting my nerves. I turned the light out, and opened my room door, when I seemed to hear the sound of voices above me. The first words attracted my attention.

"I tell you her name is Craig, not Gray, and that she is your brother's grandchild. She has the green vase—I know her too well to believe that she would trust it out of her keeping."

"You can imagine, Miss Hildegarde," continued Stephen Bayliss, "that these astonishing sentences almost stunned me, for I had already learned something of the green vase. I stood there, really not able to move, even had I been willing. And then Luke Brevoort's tone came to me—whisperingly, but sharp and clear.

"You think this girl has it, then?"

"I am sure of it."

"What do you want me to do? I will not have her injured in any way."

"It will not be necessary to injure her. Help me to get it—and then let me leave this house as soon as possible."

"When do you want to try?"

"As soon as possible. I have a bottle of chloroform in my bag. You know the house and

rooms better than I do. We must find the green vase to-night.'

"They moved away, then, and I shut my door carefully, debating what was best to be done. I knew they could not mean to harm you—that would be dangerous—but there was no possible way of reaching you to warn you. I knew, also, that your room was above mine, on the second story, and that they could easily get to it from the veranda. I resolved to hide myself there, and to watch the whole proceeding. What happened inside I do not know, but I do know that it was Luke Brevoort himself who entered your room through the window, for I saw him."

"I suppose," said Hildegarde, waking to languid interest, "that he admitted Mary Patterson from the other side, then. All I can remember is hearing some one in the room. I called out, but no one answered, and I was getting up to strike a match when the cloth was thrown across my face. After that I knew no more."

"Luke Brevoort did not come out through the window—and I can tell you I remained most of the night in the corner of the veranda, swearing at myself for a fool and an idiot, and in a fever of anxiety lest they had perhaps injured you in

some way. The next day Luke Brevoort tried to tell me some story about your name not being Gray, and I listened and pretended to believe him. By and by I began to put things together. Then Miss Irma took me into her confidence, knowing how much I was interested in you. Lastly, before I came away, I told Luke Brevoort what I had seen that night, and also mentioned that you had put yourself under my advice. I did not open nor have I opened the silk piece or roll or whatever it may be, that you sent me, but when I told Luke Brevoort that, from his words I was able to gather that it is a document of some sort."

"It is a will made by Squire Daniel Brevoort, of Lady's Hall," said Hildegarde, "in which he disposes of the money which he has given in trust to his brother Luke."

"At any rate," pursued Stephen Bayliss, "Mr. Brevoort is a downcast man, willing to do anything to prevent scandal. I believe he and Miss Irma had quite a scene after you left, in which he begged her to forgive him for his unkindness."

"But it is true about her mother?" asked Hildegarde, involuntarily.

"Unfortunately, that is only too true. They are leaving Pine Bole this week, and Miss Irma



will lay the facts before her confessor. Even if it could be set aside and a dispensation given—which I doubt—she would not feel free to enter. She will try to devote her life to good works without joining any Order.”

“She has a heavy cross to bear,” said Hildegarde, gently. “Poor child!”

“Luke Brevoort told me the story of the green vase. It seems it was your grandmother’s, and at one time in its history was used for the transfer of important political secrets, no one in the world imagining that it was anything but what it seemed—a solid, beautiful ornament, cut from a single stone. Your grandmother’s people brought it with them when they came to America. After your mother married the man of her choice and left him, Daniel Brevoort was very bitter. But time and loneliness chastened him. An advantageous offer being made just then for certain of his real estate holdings he sold them, and deposited the money in trust with Luke Brevoort. I believe the bottom of the singular document which he drew up bears Luke Brevoort’s acknowledgment of the same, signed and attested. He then made his will above it and hid it in the small green vase, his brother being the only one he trusted with the

secret, for he believed in his sense of honor. Luke Brevoort told Mary Patterson how much he wanted that vase, and often and often she tried to secrete it, but the old Squire grew so turbulent always when he missed it that she had to return it to its usual place. A safe enough proceeding, she felt, for who was to interfere with anything she wanted to do after the old man's death? What happened you know, and what her chagrin and Luke Brevoort's rage must have been when they discovered that the vase had disappeared."

"And now he is willing to make retribution," said Hildegarde.

"Anxious and willing."

"You know anything of his affairs?"

"I know that when he restores the money which does not belong to him, and its interest, it will make considerable inroads upon his fortune. The interest, you must remember, has been accumulating for twenty-five years."

"But if we took the principal only?"

"You would not take quite half that which is due you. A good sum, at that—somewhere in the neighborhood of \$75,000."

"I shall speak to Florence afterward," said Hildegarde, gravely. "If she is satisfied we will

take only what Daniel Brevoort left to my mother. I know my sister will agree with me in this, and I am not anxious to do anything that looks like 'an eye for an eye.'" She smiled with great sadness. "My poormother, who suffered so much because of the lack of money, is gone, and I have little use for it. At least, I feel that way at present," and the glance she gave him was a pitiful one. "I have little use for anything in the world just now but my own grief."

"I know it," he answered gently, "and I will leave you to it. But look!"

He pointed out of the window. They were facing the old-fashioned garden. Florence stood with bowed head and drooping shoulders, looking down at the heavy rustic chair which had been the old Squire's favorite, and which had been Mrs. Craig's favorite, too, before the final attack of heart trouble which had carried her from them. Presently the girl turned her head away, and Hildegarde saw her put her handkerchief swiftly to her eyes. At that moment young Tom Phelps came out of the house and moved to her side. What he said to her made her lift her eyes swiftly to his handsome, tender face, and then place her hand on his arm with a gesture that spoke vol-

umes. Even as she took in the significance of the scene, Hildegarde noticed how rarely lovely her sister had grown, and how her cheeks glowed with life and color.

"I will leave you to your sorrow," went on the grave, manly voice beside her. "But you will allow me to return? To look at me as your sister looks at the man she loves? To give me the promise, dear, that will mean we are to spend our lives together? Hildegarde, do not send me from you without hope."

"No," she answered simply, "no—I could not do that. I am glad that you do not intrude on me now, for this time is sacred to her whom I love and whom I have lost. Afterward—" she hesitated a little— "I do like you," she continued, "if that is cause for hope."

He brought her hands to his lips with a gentle, caressing movement—then released them as gently, and left her. Hildegarde stood staring after him. She could not realize all that had happened.

"The secret of the green vase," she said, sadly; "well, I learned it. But oh, my mother, had I known how short was the time you would be left to us, how little I would have cared for anything

but you. How little, how very little is the value of material things when contrasted with one gentle glance, one kind word from the lips of those we love! And how we bemoan our short-sightedness too late. How we learn the worth of the true treasures of life only when they have escaped our grasp!"

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It was many years before Hildegarde met Luke Brevoort again. Florence was satisfied with anything her sister chose to do, and between them the two girls set aside a portion of the money restored to them to bring back to Lady's Hall some of its departed beauty. Florence and her husband live there the whole year round, and Hildegarde comes there during the summer only, for Stephen Bayliss, the enterprising business man, can not spare much time from his desk, although, he says, when old age begins to creep upon him, he, too, will make Lady's Hall his permanent home. It is a splendid old mansion, big enough to hold many families, and the most beautiful spot in it is the Lady's Room, where stands the marble statue, and at its feet the tiny green vase—back in its old-time resting-place. The Angelus still rings

from the little clock that the old Squire set with his own hands.

Of Mary Patterson nothing was ever heard again. Irma Brevoort devoted her entire life, under the guidance of a thoughtful priest, to works of charity. Not a week passed that she did not call to see the stricken woman who was her mother. One thing the girl prays for—that God will not permit that poor soul to pass out of existence without regaining sanity and receiving the Sacraments of the Church. To this end she devotes her every action. And surely God will hear her prayer.

Luke Brevoort was a better man in the years that followed. Perhaps Hildegard had as much to do with this as Irma's quiet life of sacrifice. He had expected no leniency from her—had it been his case, he knew, he would have exacted the uttermost farthing. And to do him justice, her words had stung him, for he had never known the true state of affairs at Lady's Hall. Nor could he blame Mary Patterson. He had left all in her hands and she had misused her trust—his own fault.

Then, too, the quiet gravity of his beautiful

daughter, her patient smile, which, gentle and sweet as it might be, would never again be light-hearted, the haunting look of sadness in her eyes, stung his consciousness and awoke it in the end, so that he saw beyond the life that is, to the life hereafter. Irma could not understand why God put her dearest wish beyond fulfillment. But God saw that Luke Brevoort's soul could be saved only by fire, and through his daughter's example, rather than her prayers.

And Irma and Hildegarde work together, the one giving her life, and the other what time she can spare from her home duties, and her talents to the service of God's unfortunates—a truly noble occupation. And so we leave them.

























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